DESPERATELY SEEKING MARY:  
A MYSTERY, MODEL, AND MESSAGE

A Thesis  
submitted to the Faculty of  
The School of Continuing Studies  
and of  
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

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Washington, D.C.  
April 11, 2011
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the reason why there was an increase in the awareness and visual image of the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages. It will become clear her representation and enhanced role within Christianity was a calculated decision necessary to resolve inconsistencies and gaps within the biblical narrative as well as meet a public need for the Christian faith to prosper. Even though the scripture does not contain a great deal of information about her life, a theology and devotion developed around Mary in Medieval Europe. She became an influential female image and growing icon in all art forms during this era which persists today. By examining the biblical text and other church writings of the period then juxtaposing those to the growth of images will illuminate how her responsibility in the church became redefined and expanded.

In order to fully explore why the increase was calculated and constructed, it is necessary to compare the rise of Mary's image to that of the rise of Christianity during third century Rome. After this, it becomes even more apparent that church leaders reverted to an old traditional method of communication involving the public portrayal of images to further spread the Christian religion. Exploring this formula, which catapulted Christians from cult status to legitimate religion, will highlight and underscore that the church not only understood the power of images, but that they were very skilled at using them to craft a message for the benefit of the faith.
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INTRODUCTION

During the eleventh century, philosopher and theologian Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) defended a position and coined a phrase that is still widely used today. His motto “faith seeking understanding” emphasizes the role of reason in understanding and shaping faith. In the simplest of terms, he sought to establish and emphasize the relationship between philosophy and theology, faith and reason. He argued that faith is a reasonable path to take which may further enlighten and encourage understanding. Over the centuries, Anselm’s work and that of his contemporaries, have contributed to the development of what it means to lead a Christian life.

The definition of a Christian is based on a series of beliefs rooted in a biblical narrative. Inconsistencies, contradictions, and gaps within that narrative have often led to the development of church writings and teachings in order to clarify biblical events. As a consequence, disagreements regarding the supplemental material caused division in the ranks about the way faith should be expressed and practiced. In some cases, this resulted in followers questioning what it means to live a faithful life and call oneself a Christian. For centuries, Mary, Mother of God, has been at the center of the Christian faith and religion. The Bible gives modest information about her or how she was chosen as the mother of Christ, yet she is pivotal to the story and definition of a Christian.

Mary has long been venerated in Christianity as the Mother of God. Her significance and relevance has always been noted; however, in the Middle Ages devotion to her grew dramatically and her role expanded. Mary became popular as the divine and compassionate interceder between humans and God. Additionally, Mary became a figure of perfection in terms of femininity and motherhood because it was thought she
embodied ideals sought after such as purity, humility, and as a loving mother. As Mary’s popularity grew so did her image. Churches, works of art, religious prayers, and devotionals were created in honor of her. By the thirteenth century Mary’s adoration was mainstream and controversial.

The desire to worship Mary was enthusiastically embraced by some church officials, but not all. Her rise to the woman at the center of the church caused internal strife among leaders regarding her position as well as the use of her image. While the theological argument regarding Mary was not entirely disputed, there was disagreement about the expansion of her character. Given little is known about Mary from the biblical narrative, attempts to connect the biblical gap and resolve differences as her admiration was peaking even at the surface level appears contrived and politically motivated.

In order to fully understand why the image of Mary became popular during the Middle Ages a number of factors have to be taken into consideration as well as some needed background. First, Mary, her and her story, must be investigated in order to try and find out as much about her as possible. This will be done by reading and comparing scripture to other church writings to figure out what was in the biblical narrative versus what was not. Secondly, an analysis must be done to find out if some church officials objected to just Mary’s image or images in general. To do this, an examination of a sample of pictures and the debate on art will need to be considered. It must be noted that the illustrations presented here are readily available and accessible in the public domain on the internet. Third, Mary must be put in the societal context. Mary has always been part of the Christian conversation so trying to determine why it was not until the Middle
Ages that her image gained momentum will have to include a grasp of the medieval cultural landscape.

Lastly, there has to be an investigation as to whether or not there is a pattern regarding the use of images. The question must be posed and pursued in an attempt to find out if visual aids have been used before, and if so how and why. It is known the first time a Christian image is publically used on a wide scale for devotion is under Constantine, the first Christian emperor. He was the first Roman leader to legitimize the faith and it is noted his victory on the battlefield is linked to an image of the Christian cross. It is also under his reign Christian images were used as a method to communicate the Christian message in an attempt to turn skeptics into followers and spread the faith.

By applying the same formula instituted under Constantine, it will become clear that church leaders and rulers understood the power of images as a way to spread the Christian message. It is widely known the Middle Ages was a very Theo centric era, meaning God was at the center of everything and the subject of much debate. By putting Mary in this societal context and applying the Constantine blueprint, it is apparent the rise in her image can be attributed to the fundamental belief and growth among Christians that she was the mother of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and should be held in highest esteem, but it would be also correct to associate the spread of her image as a necessity and a calculated decision among a few individuals to use the image for the betterment of the Christian movement. What these individuals did not, or may not have anticipated, are that the images would take hold and forever change the face of Christianity. What remains to be seen is the impact of the image and whether or not is has been a useful tool in finding faith or if it has become an out of date trend.
SECTION I:

FORMULA FOR A CHRISTIAN EMPIRE
CHAPTER 1
THIRD CENTURY ROME

There are thousands of books dedicated to the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean. Although it is difficult to reconstruct with certainty, most historians believe the founding of Rome dates back to the early days of society in the year of 753 B.C.\(^1\) Without a doubt, the history of Rome is expansive and exhaustive; therefore, for the purpose of this discussion it is only worth noting that the empire likely went through numerous periods of reinvention. Over the span of centuries, there were moments of monarchy, republic, and emperor rule. In the end Constantine XI was emperor and he died defending the city Constantinople against the Turks in 1453.\(^2\) The Roman Empire fell after the defeat of a city founded by the empire’s first Christian emperor, Constantine.

During the span of time, 753 B.C. to 1453, Rome saw many leaders and expansions. The lands conquered by Rome and its armies shifted from Spain to Africa to Scotland. At any given time, Rome was extending and contracting, reinventing to maintain the system it had instituted. Of course, this system was different from leader to leader and the world saw a different face of Rome depending on who was in charge. The one constant theme across the many generations was a strong sense of faith and culture.

Even today, it is common for policies to shift, lands to change, and governing to alter depending on who is leading a nation. In the case of Rome, however, the change from Diocletian to Constantine was a shift that has repercussions still felt today. Prior to


\(^2\) Ibid., 678.
Constantine, Rome was ruled by the emperor Diocletian (284-305). He divided the Empire into two states: east and west, and had a carefully structured system of succession in place so that his style of government would remain intact after his death. An important note is there was profound change occurring in the empire and as a result Diocletian instituted a series of economic, political, and military reforms which included having four regional emperors and a collegiate system that was built around traditional Roman values and religion. As part of this Roman values revival, he reinstituted Christian persecutions. This consisted of book burnings of scripture and executions which likely sent the church leaders and followers into turmoil. Christians had a long history of persecution and this decision no doubt caused a great amount of angst among followers.

The first reported acts of Christian persecution began under the emperor Nero. After a fire broke out in Rome in 64 A.C. and destroyed most of the city it is believed Christians were blamed for the fire so that Nero could divert attention to them and avoid the blame for starting the fire himself. Nero’s precedent continued sporadically over the next hundred years and maltreatment occurred primarily based upon who was emperor. Most leaders were quick to let local communities function according to their own set of conditions for harassment, but generally there was skepticism regarding Christianity in the countryside. The majority of Romans were pagan and believed in many gods; the

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3 Ibid., 674-675.


Christians refused to sacrifice and many pagans held the belief their refusal was treason and sacrilege.\textsuperscript{8} The division among Christians and pagans continued to grow especially at a fragile time in the empire. 

Given the Christian history and Diocletian’s directive to reinstate persecution there is no doubt this must have caused growing unrest in communities already experiencing economic and political hardship. Some of Diocletian’s policies thwarted a downward slide for Rome, but the overall atmosphere was still turbulent and tenuous. More times than not, a fragile empire in a fragile state will eventually lead to new leadership given the right catalyst. It happened then in Rome and it happens now.

After Diocletian’s death his carefully laid plans and policies came apart almost immediately. The death of Constatnus in 306 A.D. lead to a divided Roman rule among Constantine and Maxentius; both whom ruled the empire and by 308 A.D. both wanted absolute power.\textsuperscript{9} The dual leadership was not a good fit for Rome and the empire was still very unstable. A confused head of state, coupled with social tension and constant invasion threats must have left a feeling of unease among the citizenry. Christians likely felt the brunt of this chaos as they were mostly a lower class of society, slaves and soldiers, who had not only been pinpointed by persecution, but also the part of the group responsible for waging war. If any group wanted a change for the better, it would have been them. They must have wanted a long term plan that would have stopped the persecutions for good and turned skepticism about their cult into a legitimate religion worthy of respect. Constantine provided Christians this hope and a way out of discrimination into the mainstream culture after he saw an image of the Christian cross.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{9} Freeman, \textit{Egypt, Greece, and Rome}, 561.
CHAPTER 2

CONSTANTINE’S CROSS

In terms of world history significance, few developments can rival the impact of the triumph of Christianity within Rome. Originally a minor sect within Judaism, this faction immediately became legitimate and credible by the actions of Constantine. In 312 A.D., there was a fight for power at Milivan Bridge and the victor forever changed the world by having a vision or dream of an image of the Christian cross before battle.

The battle between Constantine and Maxentius is well known and examined. When Constantine arrived at Milivan Bridge he claims to have prayed to the highest of Gods for a victory. In return, he received a vision in the form of an image which meant for him to conquer in the name of the representation, and that picture was a cross. While there are variations on what he saw, most stories give an account that there was a sign in the sky with the words “conquer by this” and he saw a Chi-Rho sign (x and p) which is a symbol made of Greek letters meaning Christ.\(^1\) An example of this can be seen in figure one (1).\(^2\) Constantine then instructed the soldiers to carry the sign into battle and some scholars believe this is the first time this image was publically used.\(^3\) There have been several paintings and visual representations celebrating this win and virtually all of them have

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\(^3\) Dupree, *Churches*, 23.
some variation of the Chi-Rho sign as seen in Raphael’s *Vision of the Cross* (figure 2).⁴

In the end, Constantine won the victory and believed he won because he worshipped the right God.⁵ After the victory, Constantine began to refer to himself as Christian and essentially overnight the religion went from cult sect to legitimate faith.

![Image of Vision of the Cross](https://www.artrenewal.org/pages/artwork.php?artworkid=12131&size=large)

Figure 2. Raphael, *Vision of the Cross*, 1520-1524  
*Source:* Art Renewal, *Vision of the Cross,* Art Renewal public photo gallery,  

Constantine’s conversion to Christianity has long been studied and examined. There is considerable debate about whether or not Constantine was Christian before the battle and that he did not convert with his vision at the cross before battle. For purpose of this discussion, the debate about whether or not Constantine converted at Milvian Bridge or whether he was secretly already a Christian is not important. Conversion or not, after

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⁴ Art Renewal, “Vision of the Cross,” Art Renewal public photo gallery,  

312 A.D. Constantine began to refer to himself as a Christian and it was predicated on an image of the cross. An image he carried into the fight and eventually duplicated across the empire.

After the victory at Milivan Bridge, Constantine became emperor and he immediately began implementing a number of Christian friendly policies. It is believed that Constantine’s experience as a member of the imperial court in the East where he encountered and witnessed a brunt of the Christian persecution by Diocletian had an impact on him.\textsuperscript{6} The new leader took steps to not only learn about his new religion, but to also help followers transform public skepticism into veneration. According to the autobiography of Constantine, \textit{The Vita Constantini}, authored by Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, it is relayed that Constantine had much to learn about his new religion and that he began to read scripture, travel with clergy, and began a period of Christian patronage.\textsuperscript{7} Another one of Constantine’s closest advisors, Bishop Cordera of Spain, advised him on laws of morality and how a Christian emperor should rule.\textsuperscript{8} His first legal act was to write a letter granting restitution of confiscated Christian property during the persecutions and then he granted money and legal exemptions for them.\textsuperscript{9} Other laws exempted Christian ministers from public service to worship and prayer and grants for construction of Christian public places of worship were made.\textsuperscript{10} Even today some of the works commissioned during this time are still visible. Remnants of a colossal statue of


\textsuperscript{7} Odhal, “God and Constantine,” 331.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 332.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 334.
Constantine including the head, feet, and hands (as seen in the next chapter in figure 3) are still observable in Rome as well as several Constantine churches which will be discussed later chapters.

Constantine’s dedication to Christianity went farther than legal exemptions and patronage; he was personally committed to interpret what it meant to be a Christian. For example, he wrote numerous letters on the subject and personally intervened during a church disagreement on the Donatists of North Africa. The Donatists said that priest and bishops who strayed from the Christian faith could not be readmitted to the church and the emperor did not concur.11 Another example was Constantine’s involvement at the Council of Nicaea. The emperor addressed the Council in 325 on the interpretation of issues and questions about what it means to be Christian. This resulted in an establishment of the Christian doctrine which sought to settle debates within the early Christian communities and what it believed to be the teachings of the Apostles regarding the definition of Christ.12 The Council of Nicea set the ground rules for discussions of Christology and accepted the formula of the consubstantiality (homoousia) of the Father and Son; this had come into question as part of the Arian heresy which questioned the divinity of Jesus.13 After the Council of Nicea, it was approved that Christ was the one true God and it established a uniform Christian doctrine. Constantine felt his role was to keep the church in tact and to solve internal divisions. Further, he felt any divisions

11 The History Channel, “Constantine.”


would offend the Christian God and the empire would suffer in return. Many believe part of the Constantine’s dedication to Christianity came because he had witnessed previous pagan emperors fail and end in an unhappy endings. According to Eusebius, Constantine felt that he had a personal relationship with God and that it was his job and mission to help define Christianity and focus the doctrine. He felt it was his duty to continually make progress towards piety and others recognized the emperor as an instructor in the practice of pietas. The image of being a good Christian and a good Christian emperor was important to publically portray for Constantine and church leaders.

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14 The History Channel, “Constantine.”
16 Ibid.
CHAPTER 3
CONSTANTINE’S IMAGE

What is truly significant is how Constantine wanted to be portrayed. Slowly, Rome turned into a Christian city adorned with Christian images instead of one lathered in pagan statues. After the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D., Christian art not only became permitted, but Constantine highly encouraged it.\(^1\) Prior to his reign, it is thought Christian art was mostly “underground” such as in catacombs and inside house churches mostly due to the persecution of the faithful.\(^2\)

Most probably preferred to keep their faith private in order to avoid a backlash and possible oppression from leaders and other skeptics. Under Constantine that changed. He was a huge patron and started to commission churches for the first time. Constantine ceded laterani Palace to Bishop Militages and construction for public worship for the Roman population was commissioned as well as the construction of other basicallas such the famous San Petro.\(^3\) Some examples of the basicallas that Constantine had built are the Lateran Basilica and old St. Peters in Rome, the Church of the Apolotes and the original Hagia

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\(^1\) Odhal, “God and Constantine,” 334.


\(^3\) Dupree, Churches, 23.
Sophia, as well as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Constantine’s dedication to Christian art did not stop with the building of places of worship. The triumphal arch built in his honor after the defeat of Maxentius is ascribed the victory to the divinity (figure 4). Also, various statutes of Constantine began to become a fixture in Rome and some pieces of a colossal statue of him is still be seen today; figure 3 on the previous page is the head of that statue. It is easy to see that Christianity was attempting to become more public through visual representation that is was a mainstream religion worthy of respect and worship. Church leaders with the aid of the emperor were making an effort to educate people of the Christian message through the use of public images.

Constantine was also doing his part to learn and educate others about Christ. He began to understand that the Christian God loved good and hated evil. Even more, that it was through kind benevolence he awarded those who worshipped correctly and lived justly, but it was out of righteous anger he punished those who rejected the religion. He also picked up on the notion that the fear of the Almighty God was

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4 Ibid., 23.


6 Ibid.

not an inappropriate emotion for a true believer. Lactinius, another of Constantine’s advisors, wrote a book which preached that there were three defining steps for the ultimate truth: recognize the fallacy of the pagan gods; that there is one supreme god; and one must come to know god’s servant and messenger. Constantine was not just moving away from paganism, but he was moving toward understanding that the acceptance of power from the divine required duties in return and failure to perform those duties could result in a loss of divine power and benevolence. This became reinforced when a once Christian alliance and companion Licinius converted back to paganism. Licinius was eventually defeated by Constantine in 324 A.D. and he becomes the sole emperor of the empire. After this defeat, Constantine became even more convinced he was defending the “right” God and his commitment to Christianity deepened.

The visual image of Constantine and other Christian illustrations began to decorate the streets of Rome and controversy soon followed. Images and pictures were associated with pagans not Christians. One of the most vocal critics was Eusebius, Constantine’s own biographer. For example, he refused to send a picture of Christ to Constantine’s sister when she requested it, claiming he did not believe the people who painted the art or sold it were even Christians. Eusebius remained an ardent art opponent, but it would be a mistake to think he did not have a hand in creating the

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Storch, “The Eusebian Constantine,” 146.
11 The History Channel, “Constantine.”
12 Global Ministries United Methodist Church, “The Christian Empire.”
Christian image. It was his hands that wrote the words in *Vita* that encouraged the use and title of Constantine as the first divine Christian emperor.

Eusebius’s divine emperor has a definition. In Rudolph Storch’s *The Eusebian Constantine* he states the image has four elements: all success and benefit derive from the favor of the divinity; only the pious receive divine favor; the most important indication of divine favor for a pious ruler is military victory; with the victory secured, divine favor will produce peace and unity.  

13 Storch goes on to say that Eusebian wanted to make sure everyone understood that “the hand of God is present in all favorable aspects of Constantine’s reign, and, in the opinion of Eusibius, the emperor used God’s counsel as a source of guidance.”  

14 Once Constantine was portrayed as being close to God who would intervene in imperial affairs, he had to be shown as pious because God defends the pious.  

15 In *Vita*, it was important to record Constantine’s religious character and be seen as an active Christian who was a victorious and triumphant victor.  

16 This image was important to create because he needed Constantine to be the greatest ruler and for it to be understood that all the victories came about by the will of God who was the author of victory and whose power was with Constantine.  

17 Storch outlines how Eusebius describes the new military standard, the labrum or cross, as the new symbol of the divine power of Constantine. After all, it was this cross that he saw at Milivan Bridge and eventually led to victory so the Christian cross is the symbol of Christ’s victory over death, further, that

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\begin{align*}
13 & \text{ Storch, “The Eusebian Constantine,” 146.} \\
14 & \text{ Ibid.} \\
15 & \text{ Ibid.} \\
16 & \text{ Ibid.} \\
17 & \text{ Ibid., 147.}
\end{align*}
\]
by adapting it to the military victory it becomes a symbol of the military alliance with the divine.\textsuperscript{18} The image described in \textit{Vita} turns the emperor from a man of piety who gained favor with God, to a man who was God’s ally, first on the battlefield, then in ruling a peaceful empire as a benevolent ruler.\textsuperscript{19} This image was not portrayed in a visual sense by Eusebius, but it had everything to do with establishing Constantine’s place in the Christian faith and spreading a message.

For some, Constantine was only Christian to the same extent that former emperors were pagan. The impression created for Constantine and Christianity was similar to the one portrayed by pagans. The Eusebius image was the same as the one created for Roman emperors by previous panegyrists with the minor substitution of Christian god for pagan deities.\textsuperscript{20} Additionally, it has been noted the four elements of Constantine are similar to the pagan panegyric tradition.\textsuperscript{21} The connection between emperor and divine is very pagan-esq. There too, the empire has the benefit of divine intervention and possesses divine attributes; piety also plays a major role in pagan emperor rule; observes the emperor as victorious and the emphasis as outstanding ruler is also very pagan.\textsuperscript{22} The pagan predecessors had presented Roman emperors closely connected to divine forces through piety, and being pious they also expected and received victory as a reward as well as peace. Constantine, who was also interested in divine aid, turned to the Christian god as a protector deity and military ally whose favor he earned through victory instead

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
of a pagan one. For some, it seems Christians borrowed the pagan playbook and merely changed the players.

Even though there are questions surrounding Constantine conversion it is hard to ignore his dedication to support the religion. Almost overnight Christianity goes from a group of persecution to a group of patronage with the support of the leader Constantine who helps initiate a counter offensive against paganism. Constantine clearly had a Christian inclination and deliberately modified his policies to avoid offending Christians. There is no doubt he clearly wanted to be associated with the religion and took measures to turn Rome into a Christian city adorned with Christian art and churches.

Further, there is reason to believe it worked. It is common knowledge Europe was predominately pagan during the early Roman Empire and it was predominately pagan at the death of Constantine. Even though Constantine was the first Christian emperor it would be half a century before the faith would be considered the official religion of the Roman Empire and another two centuries before the conversion of the West started. Most historians agree that the available evidence indicates that Christianity was very much a minority religion at the time of Constantine’s conversion perhaps having 5 million members in an empire 60 million wide and it is estimated by Constantine’s stance the church members nearly quadrupled within a century. While

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23 Ibid., 155.
26 Ibid.
27 Bryant, “The Sect-Church Dynamic,” 304.
Constantine didn’t grow the numbers, overnight he laid the groundwork for this to happen by attempting to give Christianity a legitimate base and doctrine to grow from.

Without a doubt, there are many notable leaders in Roman history, but there is one who made a decision that still has a consequence today. Constantine is best known for being the first Christian emperor and giving credibility to what then described as a cult. It is commonly believed that by giving Christianity this legitimacy he allowed the religion to spread. The reasoning behind his decision is widely debated among scholars and surely will continue, but it may be missing the point. Constantine’s motivations do not have to fit in a category of divine inspiration or deliberate actions. It is possible to imagine that Constantine was a faithful man who believed in religious tolerance as well as a being very smart politician. It is not far fetched to believe Constantine and the church leaders saw an opportunity to help each other. Christians had been a persecuted cult whom many were skeptical of, but it was popular among slaves and soldiers. Constantine had witnessed several pagan emperors fail and Rome was unstable as well as her citizens unhappy. It only seems reasonable he would have had the forth sight to know it was time for a change in a completely different direction in an attempt to find peace and stability. He must have sensed this as a competent leader and pursued any and all opportunities that would provide him a pathway to victory and transform the face of the empire hopefully for the better. That does not mean he could not have also been a man of faith and looking for the right God to believe in.

Experimenting with different religions was not uncommon during this time. Many people were flirting with different religions and Constantine’s new found favor with Christianity may reflect the broader quest for meaning. For third century Rome that
meaning was explicitly reflected in religion therefore the switch to Christianity and the public display of the faith may have made it easier for people to learn about the theology of Jesus. Simply, Constantine’s patronage lead to a public display of Christian images that placed a prominence on the message which made it easier for the faith to grow.

One example of a man who was born around this time in the empire is Saint Augustine. He was part of two worlds as he was born to a Christian Mom and a pagan father in North Africa, and he experimented with many different religions in his life before settling on Christianity. Augustine’s two famous books, Confessions and City of God, are frequently referenced in church doctrine and philosophy. Confessions is a blend of biography, theology, and philosophy. In this book, Augustine attempts to show the reader how to live by his example and it traces the story of his life, from his birth (354 A.D.) up to his conversion to Catholicism (386 A.D.), and the book is split into two defining parts of sinfulness and redemption. He sees his own life as a path towards salvation and hopes to inspire others to take this approach and have a direct relationship to God. With this, he hopes his own admission of sin and conversion to know and praise God will be duplicated. In City of God, Augustine sees two cities; a city of God and a city of the world. One of salvation; one of damnation. Augustine postulates two symbolic cities, Jerusalem (the City of God) and Babylon. These are primarily moral and spiritual symbols: the celestial or spiritual, and the terrestrial or worldly. The one is governed by the love of God, the other by the love of self.

Augustine’s writings are rooted in the definition of faith. Christianity took Augustine to a greater wisdom and understanding that everything came from God; humans suffer from depravity and the stain of Adam & Eve is only washed away by

baptism. Augustine teaches that sin was an act that arose by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden which impacted all humanity with a stain of sin, and that as sinners all humanity must respond and fall into God’s grace. While he does not focus specifically on the development of Mary, he does focus on the idea of sin which becomes linked to Mary through church doctrine. It is Augustine’s concept of original sin that ultimately leads to the Marian doctrine and the next great church offensive in the Middle Ages.
SECTION II:

THE RISE OF MARY
CHAPTER 4
THE MIDDLE AGES

The word medieval (Latin medium aevum; "middle age") is used to describe the
time period between the classical phase of the Greek and Roman civilizations and the
Renaissance. Most scholars date the entire era at about 1000 years starting in the 5th
century and ending around the 15th century, depending on the location in Europe. Overall,
it was a time of religious movement, scholastic achievement, development of the futile
system, and a literary movement from epic to romance.¹ It was the beginning of
scholasticism and university under Charlemagne (800), the first through fourth crusades
(1096-1204), the golden age of cathedral building with the construction of Notre Dame
(1163), when Thomas Aquinas began to write (1267), Dante’s Divine Comedy entered the
stage (1303), and of course, Mary, Mother of God came into her own while Christianity
was firmly established and the official religion by 1300.

Generally, rapid development occurred in medieval Europe. Political boundaries
and cultural identities emerged setting off a chain reaction of events in the economy,
society, and political life which gave rise to new trends in religion, scholarship, and the
arts. Population distribution altered the landscape of cities and as trade increased the
social and political organization started to change the makeup of the traditional medieval
society. As a consequence, community association as well as a link to class, family, and
faith became even more important as the social structure and landscape altered.

As the overall geography began to shift, both literally and figuratively, new
pressures surfaced. European rulers started to receive pressure from the aristocracy and

¹ Contents of this chapter are from the author’s notes taken during the class The Medieval Synthesis: Art
and Religion taught by Professor Diane Apostles-Cappadona taken Spring 2010. These notes should not be
associated with the professor, but the author as described in class notes.
the church regarding the implementation of appropriate governing laws over the
citizenry. It is well known rulers during this age did not have absolute power; rather their
competence lay in developing strategic relationships with the aristocracy and the church.
Often conflicts between these competing sources of authority gave rise to new laws and
great controversy. A prime example of this growing tension of the church-state alliance is
the Investiture Controversy. During the late 11th and early 12th century this was a hotly
contested debate as to whether or not rulers had the prerogative to invest and install
church officials. Until this controversy, a fairly harmonious relationship existed between
the church and state where the Roman Emperor anointed the Pope and church officials.
As leaders attempted to gain more authority over churches, reformers sought freedom
from the control of leaders and aristocracy. This controversy lasted for several decades
and it was not until the Concordat of Worms in 1122 where there was general agreement
the Emperor would only have 'significant appointment input', not unilateral decisions. The controversy of the investiture highlights two important things: a rise of a more
educated and independent class of scholars and an escalation in tensions among the
traditional alliances.

One of the most identifying characteristics about medieval Europe was that it was
a very theocentric time period, or simply, that God was the center of everything. This was
especially true for Charlemagne, aka Charles the Great, king of France and crowned
emperor in 800. His reign was early on in the era, but his policies had a great impact on

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2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.
the rest of the period. Charlemagne was a Christian and sought to convert those he conquered. Under his reign the empire codified the feudal system and Charlemagne’s vision was to create Augustine’s City of God. In order to do this he had to teach everyone the work of the Lord and did this by creating the first university system. He built cathedrals and implemented a system so that all people could learn scripture regardless of gender. He provided schools, teachers, and books in one language with consistent practices so that everyone could worship using the same set of customs.

By spreading an education Charlemagne spread knowledge. Slowly over time, the power of knowledge seeped into the ability of individuals to think and form thoughts. One cannot help but think that as Charlemagne opened the bible to all he was also opening it up to different interpretations by all. It seems logical to conclude that as more and more people began to learn to read and write the more and more people began to raise questions about biblical inconsistencies and differing narrative accounts. His vision was probably not to grant an education to all so that individuals could in turn highlight issues with some of the text outlined in the bible or debate the foundations of the faith; however, that is what happened.

Fundamental to the Christian doctrine is the belief in the triune or trinity. Meaning, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one being. This, of course, leads to the ultimate mystery and paradox. How this happened is what is at the heart of the Christian faith and if one does not believe in the trinity then technically one is not Christian. Believing in the divinity of Christ was the foundation established by Constantine at the Council of Nicea. This whole understanding depends on the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Jesus and his apostolic witnesses, not only when they testify to their
own experience, but when it is noted that he revealed himself to them and to the world. For Christians, faith begins and ends with God; however, how it happened defies human reason even though there have been multiple attempts to bring logic into the equation.

From the earliest of times local churches and councils have composed creeds, dogmas, and other materials to try and attempt an interpretation of the scripture. The biblical text is clearly dependent on the Church for interpretation, but the church tradition also confronts and challenges the text’s limitations. Making the text connect through supplemental documents has lead to major church dispute and varying opinions on interpretation. Some of the developed creeds have faded and are no longer relevant to the culture the church finds itself in; however others are a permanent part of the doctrine. The permanent creeds are those explanations that try to tie the biblical narrative and attempt to bring some connection about how the fundamentals work. These include, but are not limited to the belief in the Marian Doctrine.

Of course, any effort to find and define these truths through dogma, creed, and any other means was controversial. It was then and is now. There are certain elements of the Christian faith which just do not allow for a logical analysis or conclusion, but as questions and challenges to the text kept coming up church leaders and other intellectuals kept trying to answer the questions to solve the mystery. Two examples are St. Ignatius and Irenaeus. In the early second century, St. Ignatius of Antioch and wrote several letters in which he insisted on the solid humanity of Jesus, a man of flesh and blood, born to Mary, tangible, feeling, suffering, dying man who came to the world out of the silence

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6 Ibid.
of God. Another early church advocate, St. Irenaeus of Lyons, insisted on the idea of incarnation and the realization of the divine word in the flesh and blood when challenged by the Gnostics. Even in the very early days of Christianity there have always been questions and attempts to explain Christianity. During the Council of Nicea Constantine tried to bring some order and clarity to the interpretive differences. As more people became educated the questions grew and attempts became more complicated.

Intellectuals and scholars of the Middle Ages did not deny the Christian truth, but debate about how humans can know the truth flourished. People wanted to know who to believe, what to believe, and why they should believe it. The questions surrounding whether knowledge of truth occurs through faith, through human reason and investigation, or through a combination of both means was the issue of the day. Anselm of Canterbury argued for faith before reason in the 11th century. Anselm’s writings indicate that he believed everything could be proven by this including the Triune. He believed that it was possible to attain a reasonable and fully integrated understanding with the Christian faith because truth is one and the believer need not be afraid to ask questions and to use “secular” knowledge. Aselm also stated, “For I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand. For I believe this: unless I believe, I will not understand.” In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas began to write and he produced a synthesis of faith and reason, “Faith has to do with

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
things that are not seen and hope with things that are not at hand.”¹¹ For Aquinas, there were truths of revelation and the truths of reason and there could not be a conflict between them. If there was a conflict then that was because there was some incomplete information or understanding.¹² Thomas also concluded two kinds of revelation: truths that one could have come to by reason, and truths which just by their nature could have never been known.¹³ Both Anselm and Aquinas produced several writings on faith, reason, and understanding in the Middle Ages, but they were far from alone. Others include Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Bonaventure (1221-1274), Peter Abelard (1079-1142) and they represent just a few of many theologians, philosophers, and scholars who were asking questions either for a greater understanding within faith, a quest to undermine it, or a quest to simply understand the fundamentals.

Early in the Middle Ages, Charlemagne sought to create Augustine’s City of God. His efforts consisted of building schools and an educational system full of books, illustrations, and information so that all people could learn the biblical narrative and stories of Christ. Christian stories were displayed in cathedrals throughout the era, but as more people became educated, more people began to debate the subject matter in order to clarify biblical inconsistencies and gaps. This occurred as the empire itself was in a period of transition and traditional alliances were stressed causing the landscape to shift. The public was becoming more aware while the church-state alliance was experiencing unrest. Specifically in the church, new orders were forming such as the Franciscans and


¹² Hellwig, Understanding Catholicism, 26.

¹³ Ibid.
Dominicans that questioned the customary reasoning and often sparred on church readings. Some of the most celebrated church philosophers of today, Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Anselm, were tackling the difficult task of focusing and defining church teachings. While the disagreements were many, one of the most controversial was regarding the Virgin Mary and her story.
CHAPTER 5

UNDERSTANDING MARY

One major area the Church had to issue creed, dogma, and other writings on is the topic of Mary, Mother of God. Her story is not one that is able to fade and her connection and role is essential to the Christian faith. Almost everyone, intellectuals and theologians, agree there are several biblical gaps when it comes to her story. The following questions represent a few of the issues that have plagued scholars for generations regarding the Virgin Mary:

1) Mary is referred to as the Virgin Mary even after giving birth to Jesus. References to brothers and sisters of Jesus in the Gospels suggest that Mary did not remain a virgin. Was Mary always a virgin?

2) The Gospels split on Mary and what she actually did. Mark barely speaks of her while Luke “fills her with spirit”. Which one the stories are correct and why is the portrayal drastically different? How was Mary chosen?

3) Even the most basic of questions about Mary such as when and where she lived are in question. None of the narrative provides information on Mary’s birth or death. When and where did Mary live? Plus, why is there no information about her background?

4) One of the biggest and most complex questions is how did Mary give birth to the son of God? How was it that Mary was without sin?

These questions have been raised since Constantine’s first Christian empire.

Recall, it was the Council of Nicea which sought to establish ground rules for Christianity. The Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit are one and reconciling this equation has been a major theological priority with great debate. If Jesus was to be divine and human then several things had to happen. One of the most important facts being that he had to be born to a human to be human. Knowing this, the human characteristic had to be better understood. If, according to early church leaders, all women were tainted by sin due to Eve’s actions in the Garden as outlined by Genesis in the Old Testament, then how
did Jesus enter this world without it? Understanding Mary was not just important, it was foundational yet no one knew anything about her from scripture.

Most associate Mary with three basic points: the annunciation, the Immaculate Conception, and her assumption into heaven. In order to proceed, a basic idea will have to be taken; many argue Mary’s story is not even scientifically plausible from the start and the counter to that claim is that through God all things are possible. Using the counter as the premise, the points may be further explored. Almost everyone knows the annunciation refers to the day the archangel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would become the Mother, Mother of God, Mother of Jesus, despite being a Virgin; Mary would conceive a child who would be called the Son of God. The Immaculate Conception is referred to the dogma that Mary, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege from God was kept free of every stain of original sin. This belief of immaculate conception was a way of stating that through Jesus God brought a new and untainted creation, his bride Mary, which was uncontaminated by the leaven of past evil.\(^1\) When pressed for proof, the answer is to be found in the assumption of Mary into heaven. The dogma of the assumption refers to Mary’s death. It is believed that after Mary died her body was taken up into heaven by the grace of God and should not be confused with Christ’s ascension. Church leaders state this had been foreshadowed in the Book of Revelation in the New Testament in the vision of the portent in heaven, “the woman clothed with the sun”, crowned with twelve stars and having the moon under her feet (Revelations 12: 1-17).\(^2\) George Tarvard outlines the Marian Doctrine in *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* as follows:

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\(^1\) Hellwig, *Understanding Catholicism*, 122.

\(^2\) Ibid., 122.
Mary conceived the Logos in the flesh by the power of the Holy Spirit, and, not being subject to the curse of Genesis 3:16, she gave birth without pain. Having experienced the Logos and the Spirit in such an intimate way, she freely remained a virgin all her life. Original sin had no effect on her since she was guided and protected by the Holy Spirit. She is venerated in her Dominion, when she died and her soul was taken to heaven. She is enabled by her divine Son to act as advocate, intercessor, and model of sinful humanity.  

Early on, Mary and a theology (or Mariology) behind her started to develop. St. Irenaeus of Lyons (life approximately 2nd century) called Mary the "second Eve" because through Mary and her willing acceptance of God's choice, God undid the harm that was done through Eve's choice to eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden.  

St. Irenaeus was probably one of the earliest Church fathers to try and explain Mary's role in Christianity and the concept of salvation. He states that by sin, that is, by disobedience or the turning away from God, the unity of the human race and the whole creation was disrupted.  

This is explained and defined in the relationship between Eve and Mary. This link is rooted in the concept of sin and obedience to God. Mary, like Eve, was also placed in a position of having to choose between the concepts, yet unlike Eve, Mary chooses to obey. She consented and obeyed God, and became the Mother of God, the true mother of all the living (Genesis 3:20). Therefore, what Eve introduced thru sin and disobedience in Garden of Eden, Mary restored through grace and obedience. Religiously, the two women are polar opposites; Eve is the damned and Mary is the salvation. Lyons influenced other writers, such as Tertullian, who wrote about the virgin birth and that the new birth through Mary righted what was lost through Eve.  

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5 Hellwig, *Understanding Catholicism*, 72.

approximately 155-220 A.D.) took the concept of sin and Eve’s disobedience and adapted it to all women claiming that all females carried the baggage of Eve. In the 4th century, Saint Ambrose (life approximately 337-397 A.D.) followed suit by picking up on the theme of the others by describing Eve as inferior to Adam and it is his view of Mary as the Mother of the Church which was eventually adopted at the 2nd Vatican council (1962-1965), “Mary is the perfect paradigm or model of the Church because of her purity of heart and faith which exemplify the perfect human response to God’s love.” Following in the 5th Century, at the Third Ecumenical Council (431 A.D.) debated the question of how Mary should be referred to, either as Theotokos or Christotokos. Theotokos means "God-bearer" or "Mother of God"; its use implies that Jesus is truly God and man (or human) in one person. There was considerable debate about the proper title given to Mary, but the majority council backed the Pope. It was believed that denying Mary the title of Theotokos would carry the implication that Jesus was not divine or that it would split his persona, one who was the son of Mary and one who was not divine. The use of the term Theotokos allows Jesus to be associated with divinity and humanity thereby holding the connection to the triune and trinity intact. Mary, Mother of God, connects the dots, but no one could really explain anything about life story from the Bible.

7 Ibid., 132.
9 Hellwig, Understanding Catholicism, 77.
Mary is been the centerpiece of the Christian faith yet little is known about her from the scripture. In the biblical narrative, readers can find most information about her in the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. However, the text does little to shed light on her story. From the scripture alone, readers do not know much about her making additional information not only vital, but necessary. The Gospel of Mark is best known for ending abruptly and containing two endings. Most of the narrative is focused on the teaching of Jesus, but here women play a prominent role and serve as faithful models until they leave the tomb.\(^\text{12}\) In the Gospel of Mark there is no mention of the angel Gabriel visiting Mary about her pending pregnancy, but the reader does learn in Mark 6:3 that Jesus is the son of Mary (excerpt of Mary’s poem):

\begin{quote}
Mark 6:3: Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him.\(^\text{13}\)
\end{quote}

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke contain much more information about the impending pregnancy of Mary. In the Gospel of Matthew, the reader is immediately given the ancestry of Jesus outlined in Matthew 1:16, “and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.”\(^\text{14}\) There are other references to Mary. In Verse 18, it is stated the Mary was engaged to Joseph, but they did not live together and she was pregnant.\(^\text{15}\) In 1:19, the author states Joseph was going to divorce Mary, but an angel appeared to him and told him he was to marry Mary as she


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 67.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 9.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 34.
was pregnant by the spirit of the Lord. By the end of Chapter 1, Joseph obeyed the angel’s orders and married Mary and they had a son.

The Gospel of Luke gives considerable detail about the birth of Jesus, but it is drastically different from the Gospel of Matthew. In Luke, 1:16, an angel named Gabriel was sent to inform Mary she will become pregnant. In 1:29, the author tells us Mary was “perplexed”, and immediately in 1:30 Gabriel asks her to not be afraid that God had found favor with her, “The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favor with God.” By verse 1:38, Mary agreed to be a servant of the Lord and will do as told, “Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her. Also, in verses 1:46-56 contains words spoken by Mary:

Luke 1:47-49: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of her servant. Surely, from now on all generation will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name.

Also noteworthy is that the Gospel of Luke is the only gospel that describes Jesus as a child. In verse 2:39-51, the author details that Jesus got lost as a child during a trip and Mary found him days later in a temple worshipping with other men. Luke, by far, contains the most information about the story of the holy family.

Most of the narrative depicted in the Gospels is about the teachings of Jesus, and most of them end with him being crucified on the cross and resurrected. There is

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16 Ibid., 9.
17 Ibid., 96.
18 Ibid., 97.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 34
considerable debate as to whether Mary was present at the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus. In Matthew and Luke there is mention of a Mary, mother of James, but no mention of Mary mother of Jesus. In Luke, the reader is told Jesus had a brother named James so the Gospel could be talking about the same Mary, but the reader does not know for certain. Also unknown and highly debatable is whether or not Mary was at the crucifixion and resurrection.

Even with little biblical narrative associated to her story, Mary becomes a pivotal character and her role is primary to the Christian faith. In Isaiah 7:14, the reader is told the Lord will give a sign, and a virgin will give birth to a son who will show that “God is with us”. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke referenced above are the two narratives which outline that Mary is the chosen one (Matthew 1:18-24; Luke 1:34-35), but the reader is never explicitly told why Mary. The audience only knows that in Mary’s poem, verses 1:46-55, Mary praises the fact the Lord has chosen her, and that forever generations will call her blessed:

**Mary’s Song**

46 And Mary said:
   “My soul glorifies the Lord
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
48 for he has been mindful
   of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
   holy is his name.
50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,
   from generation to generation.
51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
   he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
   but has lifted up the humble.
53 He has filled the hungry with good things
   but has sent the rich away empty.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful

to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

Traditional theology attributed Jesus sinless nature to the Virgin birth, removing him from the transmission of original sin. It is only later the same concept was also applied to Mary and since there is little biblical information on her other data was needed for the Mary’s story to be complete. By the 12th century, devotion to Mary was common across Europe and December 8 was established and celebrated as a feast day in memory of her.  

21 England was the center of her veneration and the following increased by such great scale it had started to become noticed and of concern to some in the church.  

22 Bernard of Clairvaux rebuked the cannons for the celebration of the feast days for Mary and he thought the emphasis placed on her sinlessness was detrracting from Jesus as the ultimate redeemer.  

23 Early theologians did not advance the idea of Mary’s pure conception. Aquinas and Bonaventure believed Mary was born with concupiscence in her soul, but was cleansed in her mother Anna’s womb then believed she lived a life free of sin.  

24 This was the predominant thought until the Franciscan order started to advance arguments that Mary was conceived free of sin meaning God cleansed Mary at conception.  

25 For many, Mary became identified with wisdom and as the bride in the Song of Songs as referenced to the bride “without stain” (Cant 4:7).  

26 Not everyone

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21 Margaret Shaus, Woman and Gender in Medieval Europe (New York: Routledge, 2006), 396-397.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
agreed with the Franciscan order and their view of Mary. The Dominicans agreed with Aquinas in that Mary was conceived with sin but cleansed in the womb.\textsuperscript{27} These questions about Mary’s conception began to reach a high point in the Middle Ages and became a focus of debate in the university. A Franciscan ally, the University of Paris, defended their position on Mary and her feast day. Due to their opposition, the Dominicans were expelled from Paris University for refusing to contort to the Marian belief and practice.\textsuperscript{28} In 1439, the Council of Basel (1431-1449) attempted to declare Mary’s sinlessness conception as dogma, but failed.\textsuperscript{29} It was not until a Franciscan became Pope, Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484), and commissioned liturgical offices to support the concept that it became to be known as the Immaculate Conception.\textsuperscript{30} Despite this development, the Dominicans remained hostile to the concept of Mary’s conception with the stain of original sin until well after 1500.\textsuperscript{31} It was only later, in 1854, the dogma of Mary was defined and she became known to all as the “woman clothed in the sun” defined by Revelations and referenced earlier (Rev. 12:1-17).\textsuperscript{32} Mary, the ultimate Mother, finally got her day and story.

The internal division over Mary and her dogma represents a great struggle among church leaders to define and focus the faith. Again, the theological argument as to why Mary was chosen is rooted in the notion of sin. In Christianity, especially Catholicism, Mary was untainted so that the Immaculate Conception can hold the key to connecting

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
the biblical dots. The idea of Mary being free from sin was finally defined by Pius IX stating, “Mary was always free of every stain of sin, all fair and perfect, a virgin undefiled, immaculate, ever blessed, and free from all of contagion of sin, from which was formed the new Adam, a reproach less, most sweet paradise of innocence.” 33

Followers are told this is fulfilled and linked through Isaiah 7:14 as previously referenced and Genesis 3:15. In this passage, it is believed God addresses Satan, who is the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head and you will strike his heel.” 34 It is thought this passage points to Mary and it is her offspring, Jesus, who will overcome Satan in the Redemption.

Undeniably, the theology of Mary is one of great controversy, curiosity, and conundrum. 35 Even though she is barely mentioned in the Bible, her image has been presented across all art forms as angelic, perfect, virginal, without sin, and obedient.

From a religious angle, Mary has become the epitome of holiness, and an example of femininity at its best; from some feminist’s point of view, Mary was merely a victim and had no choice of her fate thereby falling into a submissive role. The debate will surely continue, but it is this visual image portrayed by the religious angle which reached a high point in the Middle Ages.


CHAPTER 6
OUR LADY'S IMAGE

As previously stated, finding early Christian images is rare mainly because the persecution forced most art underground and out of the public eye. Due to the rise of Constantine there was a new day for Christians. No longer were Christians forced to remain anonymous practicing their faith in private and drawing images in catacombs. The emperor's patronage and open display of images allowed art the opportunity to flourish and grow as well as the message that does not mean, however, pre-Constantine images were nonexistent. Today, deep in the catacombs near Rome one can find a few primitive painted walls, but not many. One of the earliest images of Christ is a mosaic dated to about 250 A.D and another mosaic at approximately 300 A.D.¹ Some of the other frescos and mosaics in the catacombs date back to the late third and early fourth century about the time Constantine came into power.² Even more uncommon are early images of Mary. It is believed that the catacomb of Priscilla outlines an image of a young woman some believe to be Mary with her child in the famous nativity scene.³ As the viewer can see in figure 5 on the next page, the outline of a woman and child is fairly easy to decipher, but whether or not the image is Mary and Jesus is less easy to decode.⁴ What is clear is that even in 250 A.D. in the catacombs away from the public eye; Christians were comfortable creating and using images to spread the message the message.

¹ Dr. Francis J. Greene, "Religious Awareness in Art from Prehistory to Today," (Lecture, Crossroads New York Cultural Center, New York, November 14, 2007).
² Tavard, The Thousand Faces of Mary, 65.
³ Ibid.
The illustrations in the catacombs underscore that images were already a part of the Christian culture and tradition. Without a doubt, Christians not only were they comfortable making images in art they were comfortable using images in art. It is already known during Constantine many followers were slaves and soldiers likely unable to read or individuals who were not permitted to worship publically. Therefore, the images worked as a vital communication tool to keep the faith and story alive. Today, it is widely reported that early images of Christ in the catacombs resemble the god Apollo (figure 8, page 43) and several scholars believe that the early art forms borrowed technique from the pagan culture of the time.\(^5\) This can be noticed in the fresco from the catacomb displaying the Good Shepherd image thought to be dated around 300 A.D. (figure 6, page 43).\(^6\) Here the picture portrays a man thought to be Christ as a man carrying an animal on his shoulders; this image is thought to be similar to a pagan image. It is known that


animal sacrifice was a common activity for pagan worship, although if one substitutes Apollo for Christ it could be Christ, the Good Shepherd (figure 7, page 43). For pagans the image and story is that it is a sacrifice to the Gods; for Christians it is Christ carrying the flock of believers on his shoulders. The image is the similar, but the depiction and vocabulary changed.

It is important to point out that borrowing or copying a technique from an already existing culture would be normal. For example, there have been several times in history that a symbol was once used for a group or purpose and then it became associated with another. One of the most popular cases is the swastika. Before it became synonymous with Nazi Germany the motif was visible in Hindu works of art and has been found in various archeological digs dating back to the early days of civilization. It is easy to assume Christians may have done the same thing at this time. Christianity was a new religion, but the followers would not have thought that since it was a new religion a brand new artistic technique would have been immediately needed. They could borrow some of the images especially since they shared some similar myths. For instance, the pagan gods focused on the “hope of immortality” of this world therefore images were focused on the concept of rise and fall. Christians also shared this concept of resurrection so the use of images may resemble the same concept and the use of certain symbols or other identifying marks would seek to set them apart. Just as Constantine and church leaders may have borrowed the idea to display statues and build public houses for worship from the pagan playbook the technique and images may have also been duplicated.

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7 Humphreys, “From Apollo to Jesus Christ.”
8 Greene, “Religious Awareness in Art,” lecture.
9 Tavard, The Thousand Faces of Mary, 66.
Artistically, early images do not look very sophisticated. Of course, deterioration over time may be a contributing factor on what the viewer is able to see today, but the images do look relatively amateur compared to work in later art movements. The body
and face are not well defined, the edges are not clean, and the forms do not look realistic or human, making the whole image appear very abstract. However, the images are portrayed in such a manner that would have been understood for the citizenry of the time. Additionally, the goal would have to tell a story through visual representation not to focus on the artistic ability of the artist. As the image evolves stylistically and technically, the role of the artist does as well. Here the artist is unknown leaving one to focus solely on the image and the story. Of course, this changes over time. In most cases today a viewer knows the artist before even seeing a work of art making the story somewhat secondary. This was not the case in early art; the image itself contained the meaning and value and the artist was not even identified.

Over time, there have been countless artistic movements. The early images can simply be referred to as early Christian Art, but over time as the technique advanced, time periods and techniques became one. Over the span of the era, most art is classified as simply Medieval art, but given the vastness of time there are smaller identifying categories. Byzantine art was the name given to the style used in very early stages, and a few that later followed are the Romanesque and Gothic periods which eventually gave way to the emergence of early Renaissance art. Of course, early Renaissance art is before the dawn of one of the most well known time periods in history, the Renaissance. Some of the most important and famous artists and sculptors of Medieval art include Donatello, Giotto, Leon Battista Alberti, Cimabue, Filippo Brunelleschi, and Fra Angelico. Their work not only changed the discussion of art, but the entire visual illustration. Figures became more a human reflection of the being and not merely a flat, one dimensional character. While the styles may have advanced, the subject matter did not drastically
alter. Depicting the biblical narrative and characters in them was still popular and one of the most famous faces was Mary.

The Middle Ages saw growth and development for Mary across the board. Even though the development of her theology, Mariology, had been present for some time her supporters started to multiply exponentially and become more vocal. As discussed in the previous chapter, feast days and devotion to her began to grow. This also includes the number of practices and prayers. Specifically, St. Bernard created a prayer for her and his devotion helped set the standard for Mariology. His prayer is one the most famous in the world, falling second only to Ave Maria:

Figure 9. S Maria Maggiore

Memorae of St. Bernard
Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that any one who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, and sought thy intercession, was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto thee, Virgin of virgins, my Mother, to thee I come, before thee I stand sinful and sorrowful. Mother of the Word Incarnate! despise not my petitions, but, in thy mercy, hear and answer me. Amen

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Ava Maria (Hail Mary)
Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee;
blessed art thou amongst women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners now
and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Since Christianity started to increase patronage during the reign of Constantine,
the following years saw increased construction for cathedrals and churches for public
worship. The first church dedicated in Rome to Mary, S Maria Maggiore, is thought to be
built around the 4th century after Pope Liberius saw a vision of the Mary (figure 9, page
45). The Virgin was both the patron of the church and the embodiment of the church
and to signify the Assumption into heaven an
altarpiece was commissioned as well as a picture
of the church’s founding that signifies the
founding of the church and Rome’s commit ment
to Christianity. Christian churches, like early
artistic images, borrowed from the pagan-Roman
culture. The term basicalla is immediately
considered a church term, but during the Roman
period it was a building used for courts. Some of
the early churches are similar to these structures so
just as the image of Apollo was borrowed so was the idea behind the church building.

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10 Sacred Destinations, “S Maria Maggiore photo,” Sacred Destinations public photo gallery,

11 Emile Male, Religious Art from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century (Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 1982), 94.

12 Greene, “Religious Awareness in Art,” lecture.
As more churches and memorials began to appear across the Christian world images also evolved. Churches and the images in the story started to become more sophisticated contributing to the already major disagreement on the use of images. Opponents of the visual image feared people would begin to worship the images but there was a decision to make and use images for teaching and instruction. Churches, being the epicenter of the community, turned out to be the best place to marry the image and the story. By the end of the Middle Ages, there was major construction of churches dedicated to Mary as well as an increase in her visual image. Probably one of the most famous churches dedicated to Mary is Notre Dame (figure 10, page 46).\textsuperscript{13} This church is best known as the Virgin’s Church. Four of the six portals are dedicated to her, and she occupies the center of the two rose windows.\textsuperscript{14} In one, the men of the Old Testament surround her and in the other the labors of the months are given in relation to her; both windows pay homage to the notion she is the center toward which all things turn.\textsuperscript{15} Even though Notre Dame is probably the most known, there are plenty other churches. Another famous church is Our Lady of Chartres in France. This church was a place of pilgrimage because there was a veil of the Virgin to people came from all over Europe to visit Chartres.\textsuperscript{16} Besides Notre Dame and Chartres, a few other notables are the Speyer Cathedral in Germany, Our Lady of Flanders in Belgium, and the Santa Maria Assunta in Italy. Across Europe, churches and images of Mary began to rise and as well as a cultish following.


\textsuperscript{14} Male, Religious Art, 94.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{16} Greene, “Religious Awareness in Art,” lecture.
The portals of the church were devoted to the biblical narrative. There were no books, museums, or any place else to learn except for the church. A person could walk inside, stroll through the hallways, and see the entire story of Jesus without knowing how to read. An ordinary everyday lay man could leave knowing that Jesus was a white male with long hair, had a beard, and died on the cross. His mother was Mary and she had a fair complexion, a neutral yet peaceful face, and is in heaven with her son. The visual image became more recognized to the public than the scripture.

The public image established for Mary was one of perfection. When one thinks of Mary the first words that come to mind are holy, halo, virginal, loving, pure, mother, nurturing, protector, and humble. Mary has been used as a symbol and an image for the true ideal for a woman even before the first church was erected for her. Mary submitted to God and she was the means through which salvation entered the world. As Eve was the cause of sin, through her disobedience, Mary was the vessel of grace to right the wrong. Mary was depicted as the obedient virgin who reversed the cycle of sin and death introduced by Eve’s disobedience. This ideal image evolved into a central object of worship in the Middle Ages and many artists were commissioned to portray her piety.

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In art, many different symbols are used to identify the Virgin as well as to emphasize the attributes many associate with her image. Additionally, there are numerous images of her, but most of the visual forms fall into four main categories: the annunciation (figure 11, page 48), \(^\text{18}\) immaculate conception (figure 12), \(^\text{19}\) Madonna and child (figure 13, page 50), \(^\text{20}\) and assumption (figure 14, page 51), \(^\text{21}\) and generally, her image has evolved as her story as pointed out by Emile Male in Religious Art states as follows:

It has frequently been remarked that, beginning in the fifteenth century, the Virgin always had fine blond hair falling over a blue mantle. Miniatures and stained glass windows offer abundant examples, and the limpid blue of the garments and the gold of the hair harmonize delightfully in the windows. These celestial colors are appropriate to the youth of the Virgin. But as years pass and trials come, the Virgin’s garment change. The blue of her mantle becomes almost black, and her hair is hidden beneath a nun’s coif, covered by a fold of her mantle. At the foot of the cross the Virgin appears as a widow or religious. Her dress is a masterpiece of appropriateness; it was invented the day that it became necessary to show the Virgin upon the stage, alive, and in motion before spectators. \(^\text{22}\)


\(^{22}\) Male, Religious Art, 109.
According to the book *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, some common representations of Mary are.\(^\text{23}\)

*The Madonna and Child*: Pictures here show Mary kneeling before an infant Christ in worship with adoration. This concept is sometimes combined with the Nativity.

*The Mater Amabilis (Mother of Worthy of Love)*: Mary holds the infant Christ. She is usually standing, but is often seated on a throne.

*The Madonna of Humility*: Pictures show Mary seated on the ground with the infant Christ.

*The Virgin in Glory*: Mary shown standing in the sky, surrounded by a cherrubs.

*The Queen of Heaven*: Mary portrayed standing on the crescent moon, crowned as queen. The crown often has the twelve stars of the apocalyptic vision (Revelation 12:1)

*The Majesty of the Madonna*: Mary depicted as a celestial monarch enthroned by angels.

*Madonna dell’Misericordia (Mother of Mercy)*: Mary shown standing and gathering under her mantle with crowds whom she is protecting. It is believed when these types of pictures were commissioned by monastic order the kneeling crowd wear the clothing of the particular order for which the painting was done.

*The Madonna del Soccorso (Mother of Succor)*: This image is closely connected to the Mother of Mercy and is used mostly as a devotional indicating the protection of children. Mary is commonly referred to as the protector of children and is often shown chasing away evil.

*The Mater Dolorosa (Mother of Sorrows)*: Mary shown in sorrow for the killing of Christ. She is shown crying and sometimes wearing a veil and crown of thorns.

*The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception*: Mary is either shown with her parents, Joachim and Anna or with the Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Ghost). Other identifying traits associated with the Immaculate Conception are as follows:

a. sun and the moon
b. lily
c. rose without thorns
d. enclosed garden
e. sealed fountain
f. cedar of Lebanon
g. tree of Jesse
h. closed gate
i. spotless mirror
j. tower of David
k. twelve star

*The Virgin of the Rosary:* Mary is shown as the central figure holding a rosary and is often occupied by the three mysteries: the joyful, the sorrowful, and the glorious. This image is said to be favored by the Dominicans due to her appearance to St. Dominic.

*Votive Images:* Sometimes connected with the Virgin Mary as well. This usually happens when it is believed a miracle or a special favor occurred at a specific location. The Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome previously discussed and seen in figure 9 on page 45 is an example of this.

Some of the first paintings known to be associated with Mary are from Luke. It is thought that Luke painted three paintings of Mary with a child whom she supports by her right hand with his check against hers. An example is of this icon is the Virgin Hodegetria and this image is a wooden panel image created in the 12th century. In this creation the Virgin cradles the Christ child in left arm and points toward him with her right hand as seen in figure 13. This image is one of the most famous Byzantine images and was widely copied. The original wooden panel icon attributed to Saint Luke was housed in the Hodegon Monastery in Constantinople, a foundation made famous by its

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24 Ibid.
sacred spring whose waters were thought to have cured the blind, guided to the spring by the monastery's brethren.\textsuperscript{25} The Hodegetria image was not only enormously popular in the East, but also had an enormous impact on representations of the Virgin and Christ Child in western Europe during the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{26} Considering the likeness of the images, the iconography of the Virgin must have grown out of the early paintings such as those in the catacombs and the Hodegetrai image.

By the 12th century, Mary began to be known as the queen of heaven. The Jewish Mary depicted in the scriptures of the first century progressed into an icon representing the Theotokos, and this Mary is much different than Mary the empress decked in fine garments holding a child in her lap.\textsuperscript{27} During this shift of portrayal, or adaptation of Mary, she emerged as the mediator whom the laymen could approach and worship.\textsuperscript{28} Mary, after all, could speak to Jesus on someone's behalf. This was known from her work in the marriage at Cana. Here Mary asked Jesus to turn water into wine for the ceremony as outlined in the Gospel of John. The woman is not identified as Mary in the text, but has been identified as her since she is known to be his mother. This story presented Mary as a third party intermediary, a woman, and everyone's lady and someone every one could approach.

For many, the Middle Ages conjure up pictures of knights in shining armor as well as grand castles and cathedrals. It is true this time did put forth an effort to define women as ladies. It is the medieval society where “the lady” was put upon a pedestal and

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{27} Mary Christine Athens, “Mary in the American Catholic Church,” 103.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 104.
worshipped from afar. It is here, at the same time, Mary was depicted as “THE lady” for all. Monks, friars devoted their life to her and wanted to see her image everywhere. Specifically, Bernard of Clairvaux, Dominic, Ignatius of Loyola, all looked to Mary to be the woman in their life. Bells rang out three times a day, calling people to worship Mary and her role in incarnation; the rosary allowed the illiterate who could not read the psalms to pray to Mary to reflect on the life Christ. Her image and portrayal began to become real and humanized making Mary everyone’s lady. All men loved her; all women strived to be like her.

Overall, it is safe to state that Medieval art was symbolic. The art of the period is wrought with Christian thought and feeling, whether it be influenced by the French, Italian, or German persuasion, there was a spirit among artists to present scenes of suffering, grief, and death. While early Christian art is rare and perhaps unsophisticated, it is present. Slowly, as the artist and society transformed so did the image thereby allowing the narrative to visually come alive even if the story illustrated was not the story in scripture. As a consequence, individuals became more aware of the image. Many people attribute Mariology to the Middle Ages precisely because of the increase of her awareness and image. Churches, prayers, feasts, and various forms of art were dedicated to her, in honor of her, for her, making Mary everyone’s medieval lady, but that definition did not come without controversy or consequence.

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
CHAPTER 7
MARY, MODEL OR MYSTERY

What is known is that Mary’s background is not very well documented in the biblical text. In order to connect the gaps, church leaders wrote additional information. As the debate regarding Mary’s dogma reached a high point during the Middle Ages so did her image among men and women. The attraction to Mary, both her story and image, can best be understood as a necessity on all fronts. In other words, she was the right woman, at the right place, at the right time.

One of the most well known female writers of the Middle Ages is Christine de Pizan. She wrote two books, *A Medieval Woman’s Mirror of Honor* and *Book of the City Ladies*. In *Ladies*, she outlines three women who are in charge of building a city. The three women represented as reason, rectitude, and justice. Reason is charged with paving the way for a system of beliefs based on reason and they must be clear of current gender assumptions, rectitude is instructed to build buildings and symbols to symbolize the virtues, and justice is supposed to make sure the population of the city does not consider womankind to the cause of all evil in the world. She is probably best known for this book, but it is *Honor* which acts as an instruction manual for how to be a “lady” during the time period. It serves as a how to book for all women – princesses to peasants – on how to develop qualities to make them worthy women. Christine de Pizan’s novels go a long way in understanding what is was like to be a woman and it opens a window on how women were regarded. De Pizan outlines the virtues that all women should live by and acted as a guide to women of the age to understand how they could transform their life for the better.
De Pizan's allows one to put women's issues in historical context and try to understand why Mary became of intense interest during the medieval period. More than anything, it points out that women where looking for inspiration and a female role model that was not depicted as evil Eve and the cause of damnation. Unconsciously and consciously, there is a natural drift toward likeness especially in a time of oppression. Looking for a positive role model for women may have not been the only attraction to Mary. There seems to be a need for religious communities to have a divine feminine image. In Patricia Harrington's article *Mary and Feminity: A Psychological Critique*, she agrees with scholar Carl Jung who suggests a deep need for god-images of one's own gender in order to nurture and develop one's own sense of self.¹ Also, that it is this dimly sensed need which attracts woman to the image of the Madonna.² Here, women were seeking women and looking for a familiar face purely based on gender.

Other religions of the time also had a female central to the respective faith. The image, not necessarily visual, was there in doctrine and text. Some have viewed Marian devotionalism as a vehicle for Christianity to assimilate the feminine divine aspects of divinity that were parts of preconversion religious systems.³ Simply, the image of and story behind Mary may not be characteristics or traits exclusively reserved for Mary. Perhaps, her image and story resides in other religions as well making the increase of her image one of necessity for Christianity. Necessary because other religions had a feminine

¹ Harrington, “Mary and Feminity: A Psychological Critique,” 213.

² Ibid.

image and since women were seeking women the increase of Mary would be not only be
a positive role model for Christian women, but it would be a benefit to all of Christianity.

Mary as the role model for women and the Christian feminine divine still leaves
an investigation into the attraction for men. After all, it was the monks and friars writing
prayer and creed arguing amongst themselves to approve her doctrine. The question as to
why the image may have had such an impact can be understood through an exploration
into the unconscious. Carl Jung is a popular psychologist and his theory of archetypes is
good example of understanding the image of a mother and how it may resonate in people
regardless of gender. The introduction to Esther Hardin’s Women’s Mysteries is written
by Jung. In it he goes on to state that the term archetype is “inherited mode” of
functioning and that this biological. Further, that when this archetype is clothed with
adequate symbols it takes a hold of the individual in a startling way creating a condition
that deeply moves the person and “it is for this reason that the archetype is important for
the psychology of religion”.⁴ There can be many archetypes and one of them is that of the
mother. According to Jung, the mother archetype generates or releases certain
perceptions from a person’s unconscious so that the develops behaviors, feelings, and
activities that form a mother pattern within an individual’s experience of reality.⁵ These
images can be positive or negative depending on how a person is mothered in reality and
according to the cultural and social context. Other contributing factors and social
constructs can contribute to the overall experience, but at the core all these feelings are

⁴ Kathleen Ford, “Portrait of Our Lady: Mary, Peiro, and the Great Mother Archetype,” Journal of
Religion and Health 43, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 93.

⁵ Ibid.
activated by the unconscious attraction to the archetype. In this case, the archetype core is the Great Mother, a woman who regulates the cycles of nature and time and presides over human beings. Marina Warner agrees that this type of symbol may have an impact over our subconscious and by having both a male and female image may help maintain a sense of balance, masculine and feminine, similar to the yin and yang. This would indicate that having a female image like Mary to balance the male image of Christ would be not only normal, but sensed for an overall balance. This need for a balance of two has roots in Genesis. In Chapter one, everything is in pairs. For example, in verse 1:1, God created heaven and earth; verse 1:4, God divided lightness from darkness; verse 1:6, the waters are divided into two; verse 1:16 God made two great lights: the greater light to govern the day, the smaller light to govern the night; verse 1:27, God created man, male and female he created them. Throughout the chapter everything is two, descriptions for animals, plants, and other creatures are described as “their” and in the plural sense.

The idea of having a balance of symbols, male and female, can be found in other religions as well. Other monotheistic religions also have a pivotal feminine character. Even though the theology may be different, this role is a prominent, central feminine image. For example, other examples of female figure worship within monotheistic male dominated religions are the Islamic Fatima, and Rachael, Leah, and Sara in Judaism. While there are similarities and differences among these women in the tradition woman

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 98.
8 Warner, Alone of All Her Sex, xxiv.
are taught to identify with these women and all three are held up to be the central feminine characters. There is a male and female balance.

Fatima is a very important woman in the Islamic culture. Like Mary, the text attributed to her is small, but her story has been told through additional material. Fatima is believed to be the daughter of Muhammad and Khadidja, and she married a follower of her father, Ali. According to tradition, Muhammad maintained a close relationship with his daughter and is believed to have stated that whoever hurts her hurts him. While Islamic tradition pays homage to Fatima differently, those in the Shiite segment depict her as the eternal weeper and the judge at the end of the days. She wept for her father, Muslims believe that Fatima suffers and they share in her suffering. They connect her story to one of redemption, and that her sufferings will be rewarded on the Day of Judgment. The story of Fatima has been celebrated in Muslim traditions and she is often used as a role model for young women.

It is widely known some of the most famous woman in the torah is Sara, Rebecca, Rachael, and Leah. Sara is Abraham’s wife and her story is outlined in Genesis, but details of her story are also outlined in the Jewish midrashi. The story of Sara begins with her death, and it is also the transition of matriarch from Sarah to Rebecca, and for the patriarchs from Abraham to Isaac. Rachael and Leah are also intertwined and prominent

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11 Ibid., 134.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

Jewish women in Judaism. Also rooted in Genesis, Laban tricked Jacob into marrying Leah instead of his true love, Rachael. The story is told that Rachael took pity on her sister, Leah, who was also in love with Jacob. Rachael found out about the trick their father Laban had masterminded, but did nothing so that Leah could marry Jacob. According to the Bible in Genesis 30 and 35, Rachael was barren for many years and then died in childbirth as outlined in Genesis 47:6. The Jewish tradition stresses that because of Rachel’s infertility she is especially compassionate and understanding of other women who suffer from the same affliction. Additionally, Rachael and Leah were the wives of Jacob, and they are regarded as giving birth to the tribes of Israel. Sara, Rebecca, Rachael, and Leah are the mothers of the tribes of Israel and considered essential to the Jewish faith.

Feminine characters have always been present and part of the Christian discussion and this point should not be overlooked, but the role has not always been prominent. Today, there is growing recognition that the excessively masculine symbols and language in which the tradition has been transmitted needed to be leavened and modified by some sort of feminine principle. Psychologist CJ Jung called Pius XII’s proclamation of the dogma of Assumption on November 1, 1950 the most important religious development for 400 years. For Jung this was a spiritual fact which can be formulated as the integration of the feminine into Christianity and an integration of what was once a one-sided masculinity of the trinity further adding and that Mary should be “included for a

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16 Sered, “Rachel, Mary, and Fatima,” 132.
17 Metz interview, March 11, 2011.
18 Ford, “Portrait of Our Lady,” 93.
19 Ibid., 94.
quaternary". Jung considered the two Mary doctrines (Immaculate Conception and the Assumption) confirmed his intuition of Mary’s status and function as incorporating a feminine element in the human understanding of the nature of God. Enthusiasm for this has been received coolly on all fronts: church officials of all kinds of denominations do not call for worship of Mary and any worship should be reserved for God and others who feel the patriarchies of the church occurred during feminine repression. Keeping with tradition Mary, her image and doctrine, do not come without controversy.

There are extremes when it comes to Mary. On one side there are those who believe in the tradition of the church and her doctrine; on the other side is the feminist view of turning on the church tradition all together because of her doctrine. As previously discussed, the church perspective, there are four dogmas related to the Virgin Mary: her divine motherhood; perpetual virginity; the Immaculate Conception, sparing her of sin; her assumption into heaven. Understanding her role is paramount to the Christian faith, especially the Catholic faith. The church teaches that women should emulate Mary; young women should attempt to be pure and faithful just like Mary. Marina Warner opens her popular book Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and The Cult of the Virgin Mary with the line:

Invocations to the Virgin Mary marked out the days of my childhood in bells; her feast days gave a rhythm to the year; an eternal ideal of immortal beauty was fixed by the lineaments of her face, which gazed from every wall and niche.

20 Ibid., 95.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Warner, Alone of All Her Sex, xxii.
24 Ibid., xix.
By placing Mary as the ultimate role model that all women should strive to emulate has had critics. Many feminists argue that devotion to Mary is counterproductive to the women’s movement and presented as an ideal that no woman will ever live up to. The use of the image to portray Mary as the perfect ideal and “lady” has always had critics even in the Middle Ages and most certainly today. In Christian de Pizan’s Book of Ladies, she offered a counter interpretation to Genesis 1-3 stating the women should not be evil because one woman fell short of perfection, and that women were also faithful followers of Jesus. De Pizan said woman should not be considered or depicted as evil simply because another was not perfect. Women to could be faithful followers of Jesus and woman should rejoice in the same form as Mary. In depicting Mary as God’s mother, spouse and enthroned she is adjacent to Jesus and at the right hand of God. She challenged the reading of Geneis that women were subordinate and only temptress. She also challenged the subordination of women to men, and said that unlike men women did not wage war, cheat others of their inheritance, or create political intrigue; neither did women murder or resort to arson for political and financial gain. The feminist movement of the 1970’s followed de Pizan’s logic on the Genesis readings and today women in religion has taken on a new role, but here, it is important to acknowledge the devotion to Mary for centuries has had a huge impact on both men and woman.

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26 Ibid.
SECTION III:

IMAGE AWARENESS
CHAPTER 8

THE POWER OF THE IMAGE

Art and artists have transcended theological definitions and limitations for centuries. Over time, artists have created images that resolve paradox and cut through conceptual knots.¹ For example, art allows Mary to be enhanced beyond the dogma that in turn gives life to Mary. In previous chapters it has been noted that the biblical narrative regarding her life story is lacking, and it has been established that church leaders routinely adopted creed, dogma, and supplemental information to fill in gaps. Mary’s story is one that screams for explanation and her rise in the Middle Ages has to be seen as one out of necessity for the Christian story to solidify and further grow. It is through her that the account of Jesus is made possible, but church leaders must have faced a dilemma regarding how to rectify the gaps and tell the tale if it was not in scripture and most of the public could not read. There is no question the visual image of Mary had to be made, but what is remarkable is the way her image took hold and eventually became a contributing factor in the split of the Christian faith.

The influence of Mary’s image may best be understood by exploring the power of response. In David Freeberg’s book The Power of Images he introduces the audience to a new way of approaching images that focuses on the human response to the image as opposed to the traditional art historical analytical approach. Freeberg suggests that the relations between images and people have been overlooked and suppressed by art historians thereby glossing over the use and function of images themselves. He states:

I proceed in the belief that however much we intellectualize, even if that motion is spontaneous, there still remains a basic level of reaction that cuts across historical, social, and other contextual boundaries. It is precisely this level which pertains to

our psychological, biological, and neurological status as members of the same species that our cognition of images is allied with that of all men and women and it is this point which we seek.²

Freeberg’s analysis allows an observer to be drawn to the image without a constructed response. Painting and sculpture can make the absent present, inspire awe, rouse piety, and transform value.³ Freeberg acknowledges noted author Leon Alberti’s stance that it is art which transforms lifeless material into something of potential and that images can evoke strong responses and possibly exchange with the spectator.⁴ As early as the fourth century, Christian relics of Christ, the Virgin, and saints were used for the consecration of churches.⁵ Previously discussed, this was the case for pilgrimage to Chartres with Mary’s veil. Another example occurred in 1519 when a worker was badly injured on a project, but miraculously recovered resulting in the work site being dedicated to Mary.⁶ In this case, pictures were duplicated and commissioned because people believed the painting and other virgin statues had begun to work miracles.⁷ There are also more modern day examples of places where apparitions are thought to be seen and have initiated a pilgrimage. In 1917, at Fatima, Portugal is probably one of the most famous stories of Virgin Mary apparitions leading to a modern day revival. In 2000, then Pope John Paul II held a demonstration that attracted thousands of worshippers.⁸

³ Ibid., 45.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid., 93.
⁶ Ibid., 101.
⁷ Ibid.
⁸ The Life of Fatima, DVD (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000).
time again, there are cases where people have turned to her image as something useful, therapeutic, and consoling. From tiny pictures to giant mosaics and frescoes, from tiny statues to apparitions, all these examples indicate a personal devotion and draw to Mary.

It must not be forgotten that Mary’s reach was not and is not gender or class specific. During the early days of Christianity, images did have an appeal to illiterate for educational purposes, but her figure was used among the literate as well. For them, the image was less prone to misinterpretation than texts and was a vital meditation tool. Freeberg states, “words could lead to doubt, indeciveness, and equivocation. Sight, on the other hand, provided more direct perception.” Freeberg agrees with John Damascus on the importance of images. Damascus states as follows:

When we set up an image of Christ in any place, we appeal to the senses, and indeed we sanctify the sense of sight, which is the highest among the perceptive senses, just as by sacred speed we sanctify the sense of hearing. An image is, after all, a reminder: it is to the illiterate what a book is to the literate, and what the word is to hearing, the image is to sight. All this is approach through the senses; but it is with the mind that we lay hold on the image. We remember that God ordered that a vessel be made from wood that would not rot, gilded inside and out, and that the tables of the law should be placed in it, and the staff and the golden vessels containing the manna—all this for a reminder of what had taken place. What was this but a visual image, more compelling than any sermon? And this sacred thing was not placed in some obscure corner of a tabernacle; it was displayed in full view of the people, so that whenever they looked at it they would give honor and worship to God who had through its contents made known his design to them. They were of course not worshipping the things themselves, they were being led through them to recall the wonderful works of God, and to adore him whose works they had witnessed.

Initially, images were used for instruction, belief, and edification. There was a basic connection between human emotion and response that seems to be under-

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10 Ibid., 400.

11 Ibid., 401.
appreciated today. For whatever reason, there seems to be a blockage or clot disrupting the free flow of sentiment and passion when exploring a piece of art. It appears that many people repress the evidence of response either because the individual is embarrassed to admit it, or the reaction is repressed and there is a fear of coming to terms with the response. For Freeberg, in order to move forward, two things have to happen: an individual must survey the trivial and primitive response and look deeply inward. This is the only way to truly understand the image and the self.

In order to understand how individuals may have used art in the Middle Ages it may be helpful to use a fairly modern example. In 1994, Father Henri Nouwen wrote a book entitled The Return of the Prodigal Son. Here, Nouwen stumbled upon a painting by Rembrandt, The Return of the Prodigal Son, and it sent Nouwen on an adventure of his own. As most know, Rembrandt’s painting (figure 15, page 67) is a visual representation on the biblical story as outlined in the Gospel Luke. The narrative of Luke contains three parables: verses 15:1-7, the parable of the lost sheep; verses 15:8-10, the parable of the lost coin; and verses 15:11-32, the parable of the lost prodigal son. The rest of Luke contains other parables, but Rembrandt’s painting and Nouwen’s book are the rooted in Luke verses 15:11-32, and is a story of redemption. Here the narrative outlines a story where a man has two sons and he divides property between them. The elder brother keeps his share and continues to work for his father, obeys him, and does all that he asks. The younger brother moves away and spends his share on sinful activity, verse 15:19 reads,

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12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 432.
15 Coogan, New Oxford Annotated Bible, 126-127
"Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you."16 The father reacts in joy and encourages a celebration. As word spread of the feast, the older brother was angry that a celebration was being organized in honor of his younger brother who lost his share sinning while he, the obedient son, never received that treatment. At the end of the passage, verses 15:31-32, it is explained:

Then the father said to him ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’17

Nouwen, after seeing the painting, reflects on the biblical passages. He methodically presents the story as seeing himself in various roles as outlined in the Gospel and biblical narrative. For example, he traces why and how sees himself as the younger son; as the elder brother; and in the end as the father. He meditates on the painting, the story, and his own life. He recounts and reflects on his own story by giving an honest account of his own weaknesses and temptations. He allows himself to write about and express his own feelings of guilt, his own sins, and own personal struggle to accept forgiveness. Whether or not the reader identifies with Father Nouwen

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16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.
on the teaching or enjoys the story is not critical here. What is undeniable to all who read the book is that the passageway to the story began with Nouwen drawn to the image of the painting. He allowed himself the opportunity to follow his response to the painting and then explore why he was so drawn to the image and the story. In the end, and after years of study, he was able to complete his own journey of spiritual enlightenment and understanding through the visual image. At the conclusion of his book, he explains how he came to “live the painting” and states:

Four years ago, I went to Saint Petersburg to see Rembrandt’s The Return of the Prodigal Son,. I had little idea how much I would have to live what I then saw. I stand with awe at the place Rembrandt brought me. He led me from the kneeling, disheveled young son to the standing, bent over father, from the place of being blessed to the place of blessing.18

By using Nouwen’s example of how an image may lead one down the path of spiritual understanding it is easy to understand how and why people may have used images in the Middle Ages. During the 12th century, art was primarily monastic.19 This is not meant to indicate art was produced by monks, but that clergy dictated the art subjects to artists through patronage or other means. Since it is known it would have been possible to enter a Medieval church and walk out knowing the story of Jesus from the stained glass, paintings, and statues it is obvious the goal was to encourage people to get to know God. People, through the image, could discover that they were inspired by the story behind the painting, and perhaps identify with the message. Possibly a woman walked thru Mary’s portal and wanted to know why she was weeping in the painting or maybe a young man stood in the nave of the church and wanted to know why such a young man

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19 Male, Religious Art, 18.
was crucified on the cross. The church was the keeper of the Christian tradition, but it was also the school and art museum.

Given the length of the Middle Ages era and the vast amount of art produced, it makes sense to focus on one body of work that seems to capture the entirety of what is being discussed. First and foremost, this work needs to be selected based on an initial pull to the image. Secondly, the analysis needs to be an honest account. Third, it must be concise yet as comprehensive as space here allows. The body of work to be examined is Giotto’s Arena Chapel in Padua and will be through picture analysis, not an actual visit. Giotto is one of the most well known artists of the Middle Ages and is thought to have revived painting and introduced good drawing from natural models, which is something that had not been done in over two hundred years.\footnote{20 Giorgio Vasari, \textit{The Various Lives of Artists} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 16.} Gorgio Vasari states in the \textit{Lives of Artists} as follows:

That very same debt painters owe to Nature, which continuously serves as an example to those who strive to always to do their best by selecting her best and most beautiful parts in order to reproduce and imitate them, is also owed, in my opinion, to Giotto, the Florentine painter; for when the methods and outlines of good painting had been buried for so many years by the ruins of war, he alone, although born among inept artists, revived through God’s grace what had fallen into evil state and brought back to such a form that it could be called good.\footnote{21 Ibid., 15.}

For a first time viewer, the illustrations painted by Giotto seem overwhelming. There are so many pictures and each wall offers a series of painted biblical scenes that it is hard to even know where to begin or spend the most time. Almost immediately the panic and shock of all the scenes is placated by the color of blue. The use of the paint on the ceiling and as a backdrop in some scenes creates a calming landscape. Of course, not
being able to give a physical, eye witness account has limitations, but even from a picture book one can tell that the blue must give the chapel a sense of openness similar to an open field with the sky as the ceiling.

It was the blue that first attracted this viewer to the Giotto chapel. Honestly, blue has always been a favorite color choice, but it is the blue against the other brown and cream tones that is attractive. Looking at them together gives off a very earthy, natural impression. The ceiling is the sky while the paintings represent the earth dirt. After a casual stroll through the pictures, it becomes apparent the life of Christ is outlined as well as the Life of the Virgin Mary and her parents. Overall, the presentation is simple, rustic, and beautifully presented. A favorite characteristic is the use of what looks like a stage or platform in some scenes. Giotto used a similar structure which almost makes the scenes feel like a small intimate theater. Taking this into consideration with the initial feeling of the sky and earth, one cannot help but feel like the Chapel is seeking to portray earth being God's theater where characters act out scenes in a play. All of the images are carefully orchestrated with the proper positions and roles, but some of the characters are unknown and unrecognizable.

After the initial attraction to the Arena Chapel some background and context was required. The Arena Chapel was painted by Giotto and commissioned by Enrico Scrovegni in the 14 century; further, it is probably one of the most studied and examined chapels in the history of art. Countless conversations and discussions about the placement of certain frescoes have been recorded as well as why Scrovegni had the work commissioned. Many contend the reason why the chapel was built and decorated was to

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expiate the sin of usury which had led to increased wealth. Further, debate about why frescoes are painted in a certain order, for example, why the Pact of Judas is opposite the Visitation, has long been discussed. These points are worthwhile and important, but the focus here is to remain cognizant of the initial pull to the image and not pick up on these conversations. Except it is pertinent to point out that if Scorvegni allowed himself to be drawn to the pull of the image similar to Nouwen then it is possible the family reflected on all the transgressions and found comfort in the image as did Father Henri.

One of the most wonderful characteristics about the Chapel is that there is probably a scene for everyone to gravitate towards. Depending on an individual’s own experience, there is likely at least one fresco that catches an eye. Here, there are three. First, the fresco where an angel appears to Saint Anna (figure 16, page 72). She is kneeling in what appears to be her house and an angel appears to her while her servant sits outside the door weaving. Originally, Anna was mistaken for Mary so the idea that this scene is supposed to depict Mary’s mother was an education and story worth exploring. After finding out that it is supposed to be the angel announcing to her she will conceive a child this scene lead this viewer to the debate of the Immaculate Conception and dogma of Mary Middle Ages. Also, the image presents a new storyline to the biblical narrative and a new piece of information. Further, there is something intensely personal about the painting. The viewer almost feels as if he/she is invading on Anna’s privacy as she prays. One cannot help but be pulled into the scene for further clarification of what it going on.

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23 Ibid., 274.

Of course, Mary is naturally featured in some scenes. A viewer can see her in the nativity, wedding at Cana, the ascension, etc. However, there are several scenes of her life. The viewer is exposed to her as she flees to Egypt, before getting married, getting married, and as a young girl. Two of the most striking frescos related to Mary are related to the Immaculate Conception. The two frescoes dedicated to this scene are split over an archway (figures 17 and 18, page 73). On one side is Gabriel and the other side is Mary. Again, Giotto has selected to use the structure of the stage. Both Gabriel and Mary are positioned in house and put behind curtains. It is almost as if it is being depicted as a backstage behind the curtains moment where the viewer is finally witnessing how the entire story is made possible. The figure and faces of both images are very demur and docile. There is not expression in the face or grand entrance. Gabriel gestures as though instructions are being handed down while Mary sits patiently with her hands folded across her as if she understands and accepts.

Figure 16. Giotto, Scenes from the Life of Joachim, Arena Chapel

25 Ibid.
Figure 17. Giotto, Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, Arena Chapel
Source: Art Wallpaper, “Giotto Bondone: Arena Chapel,” Art Wallpaper public photo gallery,

Figure 18. Giotto, Virgin Mary receiving Gabriel’s message, Arena Chapel
Source: Art Wallpaper, “Giotto Bondone: Arena Chapel,” Art Wallpaper public photo gallery,
The Arena Chapel analysis is probably an elementary one at best, but nonetheless, it is based on an initial pull to the image and a quest to understand the initial response. The rationale behind the attraction may be rooted in a shared gender, mother archetype, or the notion of fertility, but to leave it at that seems like a surface level breakdown. It took Nouwen years to investigate his pull to Rembrandt and that is likely the case here. Simply understanding how an image can be utilized to further explore an individual’s own sense of self is major progress towards comprehending the sway of the power of the image.

Art has always had an integral part in society and humanity. It has also always been integral to the quest for knowledge and understanding. Two of the most popular psychologists in this field are Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. Both explored the arts and sciences as a way to better understand humans in life. There has been a great deal of information presented on psychoanalyses here, but what is important to acknowledge is that an individual can find self discovery through image and in turn, that may shed some light on the relationship among art, society, and the human spirit. Carl Jung summarizes:

Therein lays the social significance of art: it is constantly at work educating the spirit of the age, conjuring up the forms in which the age is more lacking. The unsatisfied yearning of the artist reaches back to the primordial image in the unconscious, which is best fitted to compensate the inadequacy and one-sidedness of the present. The artist seizes on this image and, in raising it from the deepest unconsciousness, he brings in into relation with conscious values, and thereby transforming it until it can be accepted by the minds of his contemporaries according to their powers.26

Humans have long expressed themselves with images and symbols throughout history. Objects used in rituals, cave drawings, catacombs, hieroglyphics have all contained illustrations which are a visual record of self-expression and communication

through art and image. The benefits of using the image can ultimately bring insight into emotion, thought, and feeling eventually leading someone down a path of self discovery, personal fulfillment, and empowerment. Meditation on an image can also encourage self-discovery and emotional growth. This can happen either in the creation of art or in the discovery of its meaning. By examining the attraction to an image and exploring the response to it can lead to some level of insight as long as the individual is open to discovering why the pull of the image is so strong.

Art, religion, and science, are all intended to lead a self critique and better self awareness; but it is in art where an individual can find a deeper level of understanding existence and where life can find meaning. While most art historians and scholars clash over the definition of art most artists will explain the process of creating a piece of art is an examination of personal emotion, beliefs, and actions that reflect the realities of life. The illustrations created by it, both positive and negative, allow individuals to see life in all stages of complexity as long as it speaks honestly about the experience. The relationship between artist and observer has long been debated and it will continue for decades, but is fundamental to comprehending the meaning and value in the image. Further, too gloss over the importance of that relationship would delete an important element to truly understanding existence from an anthropological, cultural, and psychological viewpoint. Art and the visual image should allow an individual to look at existence through various lenses, and provide a stimulus for reflection and reevaluation. That is what Father Nouwen did and that is what David Freeberg introduces. One has to think that artists and monks directing pictures in the church portals understood the power and pull of the image as well.
CHAPTER 9

THE POLITICS OF THE IMAGE

The disagreement surrounding the use of images is almost as old as the Christian art in the catacombs. The visual aids for instruction and teaching have generated considerable debate since the establishment of the religion in third century Rome. As already noted in Sections I & II, Constantine’s autobiographer Eusebius was an early opponent of art, but the use of images already had a great number of supporters, including the emperor. As the debate persisted, it is apparent the overall comfort level with applying the visual image to biblical stories grew as evidenced in the patronage of churches and other art forms; however, as the representation expanded so did the angst. As a consequence, the debate reached a tipping point that has repercussions still today.

Christians have long argued the role of holy images, or icons. The church was seriously divided over this subject from the beginning and eventually the use of icons was granted by the Seventh Ecumenical Council which met in Nicaea in 787. One common theory and popular argument against the use of art was that it violated the second commandment which prohibited religious images because they were idolatrous. Another argument against art was the connection it had to pagan worship. Proponents successfully defended the position that given the high illiteracy rate among the public the illustrations were needed to educate laymen. Plus, literacy aside, art allowed for the communication of the Christian message despite language differences. Another argument advocates used was that if humans were a creation of God then creating “things” was a natural expression of and for the divine.
Commonly known is that an icon can be a sacred image representing the saints, Christ, and the Virgin Mary, as well as biblical narrative scenes. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, the official definition is that an icon is a religious image.\(^1\) In Byzantium icons could be crafted in all forms, including stone, fresco, or textile.\(^2\) During this time, icons allowed a communication with the figure represented, and it is thought that healings and good fortune were among the prayers associated with the icon and viewer.\(^3\) There was great concern that followers could end up worshipping the image and this was considered a sin. For instance, in the story of the golden calf based upon the biblical narrative in Exodus 32, things do not end well for those who worshipped the cow. The basic account is that when Moses went to Mount Sinai Aaron made a golden cow as a representation of God for worship. When this was made known, Moses instructed the destruction of the cow and the killing of those who worshipped the golden calf. In the end, the sin committed was considered idolatry and no one should worship an idol, or in this case a cow created from gold.

The second commandment is fairly clear against the worship of idols. However, a distinction needs to be made between idol and icon. Stated above, icons are religious images representing or portraying saints as well as a biblical narrative. According to the Merriam Dictionary, an idol is an image of god; object of devotion.\(^4\) Common use and understanding of the icons were that they aided in the communication with the figure represented by channeling the spirit of the icon. The use of the icon was idolatry to some,

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1. The New Merriam Webster Dictionary, s.v. "Icon."
2. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Icons and Iconoclasm in Byzantium."
3. Ibid.
4. The New Merriam Webster Dictionary, s.v. "Idol.".
but not to others, hence the debate on the use of images. According to Freeberg,

Eusebius belief is as follows:

Arguments against images are that artists create and could not in any way match Christ. This was believed by Eusebius, Constantine’s autobiographer, and others. Opponents of art stated that material images are temerarious creations, and therefore idolatrous creations of the devil.5

The use of icons in worship was seen as a violation of the second commandment. Under Emperor Leo III (717-741) the issue of images came to a head and he issued a decree forbidding the images of icons in religious painting, mosaics and statues.6 This ban did not relate to destruction of images, but he sought to restrict their use and veneration. He did not want images of the human body, Jesus or Mary or saints, to be placed in churches and because of this many artists looked for more symbolic ways to portray the images by using the cross or the Eucharist bread and wine.7 Leo’s decision was supported by some bishops, but was meant with great opposition by the citizenry and majority of the Monks.8 Recall, Monks, directed a large part of art being displayed in churches. Despite this opposition, further decrees were instituted and in 730 Leo III issued a second decree which ordered the removal of all images from churches, and he took political and financial measures against Pope Gregory III when he protested his decisions.9 In spite of popular opposition, the ban on icons continued under Constantine V and this was followed by another approval of policies which reaffirmed the icons of the

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6 Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of Mary*, 68.
7 Ibid., 69.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
Virgin Mary and saints were indeed idols.\footnote{Ibid.} The bar continued until 787 A.D. when the Seventh Ecumenical Council (also referred to the as the Second Council of Nicea) reversed the policy at the behest of Basilica Irene (797-802) widow of Leo IV.\footnote{Ibid.} The council voted to abolish the decrees and agreed to start to regulate the veneration of icons.\footnote{Ibid.} It endorsed a doctrine that was defended by the monk St. Theodore Studite (759-826) who stated that the veneration of icons is traditional and also is in line with the preaching of the gospel according to the certainty of the true and nonillusionary word.\footnote{Ibid.} Papal leaders signed the agreement, but debate lingered on until Michael III was crowned Emperor as a child and his mother, Empress Theodora, acted on his behalf and rescinded all remaining iconoclastic policies 843.\footnote{Ibid.} This back and forth teaching on the practices of icons and images was resolved in 843, but the issue of what is an idol and idolatry continued.

As outlined in the previous chapter, John of Damascus was an ardent supporter of images. To this day, his writings are often cited in support of the practice of images in the church. His basic argument was that the use of illustration is part of the Christian tradition and that there are levels of worship when considering their usage. The image brings about a remembrance of actual events, but also since God took on the human image visible representations demonstrated a faith in the divine. During the Middle Ages, several prominent theologians also spoke passionately about the use of images. Thomas
Aquinas and Saint Bonaventure agreed on the use of images and the benefits it could bring. Aquinas states:

A reason for the church to use images in the church: first, for the instruction of the unlettered, who might learn from them as if from books; second, so that the mystery of the Incarnation and the examples of the saints might remain more firmly in our memory by being daily represented to our eyes; and third, to excite emotions which are more effectively aroused by things seen than by things heard.\(^1\)

Bonaventure's view was similar to Aquinas. Freeberg explains in *Images* that Bonaventure held the same view as Aquinas, but his concern was also for the future of images. Another example Freeberg notes is that Bonaventure presents a statement by Gregory the Great in a letter rebuking Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles for taking down the images in churches so that those who are illiterate might at least read by seeing on the walls what they cannot read in books.\(^2\) These arguments to use images skirted the idolatry debate and focused on the appeal to the illiterate. The images should be used for instruction and teaching in an attempt to honor whom it represents.

As already mentioned, some Christian theologians opposed the use of images because of the comparison to the pagan religions. It bears repeating that after Constantine became emperor, removing pagan icons was a priority. Christians sought to remove the statues, paintings, and sculptures of the pagan gods as well as erase any memorial or testimony about the pagan worshippers.\(^3\) In place Christians built churches for their own

\(^{1}\) Freeberg, *The Power of Images*, 162.

\(^{2}\) Ibid., 163.

\(^{3}\) Vasari, *Artists*, 5.
worship, and in some cases as in St. Peter’s, it was more adorned than it was with under pagan worship.\textsuperscript{18} Vasari states:

Then, with the greatest fervor and diligence, it [Christians] applied itself to removing and eradicating on every side the slightest which sin may arise... in whose honour statues and other memorials had been constructed by the genius of antiquity. Moreover, in order to build churches for Christian worship, not only did this religion destroy the most honoured temples to pagan idols, but, in order to ennoble and adorn St. Peter’s with more ornaments than it had originally possessed, it plundered the columns of stone on the Tomb of Hadrian, now called Castel Sant’Angelo....And although the Christians did not do such things out of hatred for genius, but rather only to condemn and eradicate the gods of the pagans.\textsuperscript{19}

Eusebius, the ever art critic, opposed them for this reason. As reported in Section I, he lectured Constantine’s sister, Constantia for wanting a picture of Jesus stating, “a Christian does not need a picture.”\textsuperscript{20} He believed the Christian images had a very pagan like resemembleance and he was correct.\textsuperscript{21} It is now known the artists who likely decorated the catacombs or commissioned the first works would have likely used or imitated pagan models.\textsuperscript{22} As seen from the figures and information presented in early chapters it is easy to see that artists borrowed pictures from pagan art and it is likely the first portraits of Mary were drawn in imitation of various goddesses.

One of the most commonly linked goddess in visual representation is to the Egyptian Isis. A comparison of the Madonna and Child image is represented in figure 19

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Tavard, \textit{The Thousand Faces of Mary}, 66.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
on page 82.\textsuperscript{23} Isis was known was the Great Mother goddess in the ancient world and also carries the story of a virgin birth and as the mother of a god and redeemer.\textsuperscript{24} Also noteworthy is that some believe the connection between Isis and Mary may go beyond the image. Many studies and research projects have been undertaken that seek to draw comparisons between the two stories of Mary and Jesus and Isis and her son Odinosys. While the comparative analysis on this topic is worthy of inquiry, the examination ends here on the image. The image of Madonna and child was a popular image across religions. A mother holding her child appeals to the most simple human spirit and emotion as explained by the mother archetype outlined earlier and was a popular image across religions, Christian, pagan, and others.

It is clear there has been considerable debate about the use of art since the time of the first Christian emperor, Constantine. Even though he endorsed the creation of public worship and the display of images, his own autobiographer disapproved of the image. Opponents claimed the creation of the image was representative of the previous pagan religion and the worship of the image was idolatry, therefore it was clearly in violation of the second commandment. Proponents saw the image as an opportunity to not only use the art form as a communication tool, but as an honor to those who they represent. The issue has been settled and revisited throughout history many times. In the end, the use of images was approved and adopted, but the issue had consequences especially as the image of Mary continued to rise and devotion to her increased.


\textsuperscript{24} Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, \textit{The Jesus Mysteries} (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999).
What is clear is that the interest in Mary was not felt by all. The Protestant Reformation grew in part out of frustration by those who felt the devotion to her as sacrilegious and idolatrous. Protestant leaders such as Martin Luther and John Calvin believed Mary has a special place in Christianity, but they did not necessarily agree the worship of her was appropriate. Some Protestants accused Catholics of having a very un-Christian belief of her and that some doctrines give her a divine status that should only be reserved for Jesus. Even if the role of Mary divides the Christian community, to call oneself a Christian one must believe in her existence and that she is the Mother of God. Her link to the birth and ascension of Jesus into heaven is fundamental to the Christian faith and to some without believing that she was indeed born without sin then the prophecy is hard to explain. Today, the rift among Christians regarding the role of Mary continues and serves as a religious identifier among Christians as to whether one is Protestant or Catholic. As the image of Mary grew and her role expanded, a consequence was a split in the Christian community that is still present today.
CHAPTER 10

PATRONAGE PLUS PROMINENCE EQUALS GROWTH

The church played a far greater role in the Middle Ages than it does today. The medieval church was the epicenter of the community, an educational organization, and the presiding authority on all things moral and just. In the span of a few centuries, the church had evolved from a small community organization struggling for respectability under Constantine into one with an elaborate hierarchy granting church officials power over the empire and laity in the medieval era. Shacks once used as the bully pulpit transformed into decorated cathedrals as the Christian cult developed into something akin to a modern day corporate structure, but with a holy image. Along with this progression came immense desire to grow and turn the Christian faith into the premier religion not just for Rome, but for the world.

It is true the Middle Ages encompass a rather large amount of time, but a universal theme across the span of generations is God. One thing most scholars can agree on it is that the entire period was theocentric; God was everywhere and at the center of everything. Individuals were experimenting with different religions and split faith homes (those consisting of a pagan father, Christian mother, or vice versa) were not uncommon. For example, Augustine tested out various religions before settling on Christianity and John of Damascus was the product of an interfaith home. What this points out is that there was a societal demand for faith that presented church officials with an opportunity to increase its numbers if they could effectively communicate the message through the right medium. The church represented the perfect place for this to happen.
Constructing a grand church full of images was of course no easy feat, but providing a foundation and structure to attract interest and followers was vital to the development of the message. Today, countless research has been conducted on cathedral art and architecture while thousands of books have been written on the mosaics, stained glass, and paintings in the structures. What is clear is the stone, marble, paintings, and design became more expressive and visible as the subjects chosen became more didactic and refined. This evolution in artistic technique is quite clear by comparing the early images outlined in the catacombs and the figures at the Arena Chapel in Padua painted by Giotto. The underground images of the Good Shepherd and the Madonna and Child look similar to other religious figures in other faiths, but there is no question who is being depicted in the Arena Chapel even though some painted scenes may not have been well known. This relationship between the artist and the church served a dual purpose in medieval Europe; the image depicted was clearly a Christian image while the artist was given some latitude to explore innovative techniques to illustrate the Christian point of view. In the end, the image allowed a human connection and emotion that the text alone could not manufacture while also providing the church a chance to fill in biblical gaps and inconsistencies with art. Building the cathedrals and filling it full of images gave church leaders a way to properly package and distribute the Christian message.

There was a fundamental desire by church officials to further its Christian mission and grow. In turn, this desire was met with a societal demand for faith. To understand how leaders may have orchestrated a plan to promote Christianity looking at a modern day example of lessons in basic marketing will prove useful. Today, when a corporation or even a politician considers putting together any public relations campaign there are
some fairly basic principles followed. First, someone must inspect all levels of the institution or individual to identify the strengths, weaknesses, and threats. It is vital to understand from the ground up, inside and out, what the organization or person does best and what is different about it. Second, one must examine and classify the areas for improvement. For example, why does one organization or person have trouble communicating or reaching a particular demographic? After a very comprehensive self exam is complete, a plan is formulated about who the organization or person is, what it stands for, how the job is done, and why people should care. As part of this formulation, a determination would be made as to who the audience is and why other individuals should care about the organization or the person that is being promoted. A core message the organization or person is put together to create a brand, in other words to put a face with a name. The brand is the driving force behind the message and it should always be maintained because if it becomes tarnished, the entire organization and/or person will likely suffer. Also, no one else should ever define the brand, if that occurs, the organization or person may not endure.

Corporations and political organizations have followed these steps in order to advertise a product and further a cause for decades. From the corporate angle, products come and go, but the image and brand of the corporation has to always be dependable. Consider what happened recently with Toyota and British Petroleum (BP). When the brakes of the Toyota Camry resulted in multiple deaths, a chief concern among shareholders and investors was whether or not Toyota would lose its place in the market and in the minds of consumers. A similar thing can be said of British Petroleum after the oil spill disaster in 2010. Independent of an individual’s opinion on oil, the information
related to the spill and that it may have been the result of lax safety regulations has
tarnished the BP brand. Even today both stocks of Toyota and BP are hovering at their
lowest points in company history. In order to perform or get back to a high level of
performance in the marketplace, the organizations must start at the first step and rebuild
their image. Political organizations and politics work the same way. Today, the United
States is built on a two party system: Republican and Democrat. Usually, there is a
natural cycle to elections and party control of the respective branches of government
periodically shift according to the public sentiment; however, if a political party or person
damages the persona of the group it can take decades for the organization to recoup. For
example, consider Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal. Many believe that the
Nixon saga tarnished the Republican Party for years and kept Democrats in control of
Congress until the landslide elections of 1994. Today’s political landscape is another
prime example. The Democrats lost control of the House of Representatives in the 2010
elections after six years of power and the Republicans lost the White House in 2010 after
eights of controlling the executive branch of government. Both political parties have been
experiencing a period of rebalancing over the past decade and are attempting to rebuild
and promote their caucus as the best hope to save the country from debt and crisis.
Bottom line: when a political party is out of power or loses power they must also go back
to the first step and reevaluate what the group stands for. The church strategy
should be given the same consideration.

In third century Rome, the country was unstable and constantly at war. Christians
had been a target of sporadic persecution by Roman emperors and the pagan public
consisted mostly of Christian skeptics who had a general unease about the principles of
the faith. Christianity was one of many smaller sects in a large religion pool with cult status instead of respect. Prior to Constantine, church leaders were not even at step one. It would have been imperative to identify how the faith could grow out of the current status of oppression and into the mainstream. From this vantage point, leaders must have identified several readily apparent weaknesses such as low public perception, no public advocate or visible leader, and the most obvious that many did not know anything about what they stood for. The strengths are more difficult to recognize, but given that most slaves and soldiers were Christian and subject to persecution there was likely sympathy for them. Also, as soldiers, they were responsible for fighting the wars. Common sense leads one to assume that those waging war typically want to feel good about the grounds for battle. In this case, Christian soldiers were going into combat for their freedom. Next, the most obvious threat must have been considered the pagans as they are the group pinpointed for the discrimination. Constantine, who had seen previous pagan emperors fail, had to recognize that in order for him to succeed he needed the Christian slaves and soldiers to fight for him. Constantine and Christians had much to gain by helping each other. By Constantine converting to Christianity both sides benefited; Constantine had an army and Christians had an advocate. After Constantine’s victory, he began a period of public patronage that gave Christianity a prominence which allowed it to flourish. Christian images and public places of worship began to line the streets of Rome which paved the way for the spread of the faith and helped establish its legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Christians were finally at step one and moving up.

From the start, Christianity stumbled with its message. Constantine had to intervene to resolve conflict and disputes almost immediately as witnessed with the
Donatists and by the Arian controversy. In his effort to halt internal strife, at the First Council of Nicaea, a theology was approved that established the divinity of Christ. As Jesus was also human, this continued to raise questions and leaders tried to explain how this occurred through the actions of his beloved mother, Mary. She became central to the story, pivotal, but there was a major problem. Mary was defined as the “God bearer” or Theotokos, but given little was known about her. As her image and popularity rose so did the devotion and debate about her background and attempts to explain her role in the Christian faith were different. The problem church officials had was that different groups were attaching differing backgrounds to Mary and creating an image and definition for her that was not only controversial, but it was not uniform. The debate among the Franciscans and Dominicans highlights the split on the Marian doctrine and the underlying problem the church had with understanding Mary.

The Middle Ages was theocentric, full of economic development, population growth, education escalation, and religious fervor. If church leaders wanted to continue to increase Christian followers they would need to go back to step one. In other words, they had to do an internal self examination, identify the strengths, weakness, and threats. The strength the church had was that it had the resources and power to do this. Recall that the church was established at this time and enjoyed a harmonious relationship with the empire. While the alliance was starting to show cracks, it still had the weight of the empire to help them broadcast the Christian message. However, a serious problem had to be resolved. The internal conflict and debate regarding Mary had to be put to rest so that the message did not become confused and defined by others. Church leaders had to make a decision regarding her story to solve the debate and solidify the message to connect the
biblical gaps and inconsistencies so that Mary could be properly placed in the Christian message. Once that was done, church leaders knew exactly how to promote Mary's story because they had done it before in third century Rome. Church leaders knew the traditional formula instituted under Constantine which consisted of patronage plus prominence translates into growth of the message and the faithful could work. Marian churches were built, doctrines were approved, and her image became ingrained in the mind of the medieval public as everyone's lady. The church put forth a serious marketing campaign in an attempt to restore confidence that it was the right religion with a well-defined message. What seems to have been underestimated by the church officials is the power of Mary's image because it would become the medieval trend.

Malcolm Caldwell is the author of *The Tipping Point*. This book is a biography of an idea, and those ideas, products, messages, and behaviors spread like viruses.\(^1\) Caldwell takes the reader through several societal events/times, and one of those is the rise of Hush Puppies in the mid-1990's. He explains that until 1994, the brand was essentially dead and the company was on the brink of closure until something happened. One day two Hush Puppies executives were told by a New York City stylist that the shoe was making a comeback on the Manhattan scene. By 1995, sales had more than quadrupled and Hush Puppies won a designer of the year award.\(^2\) Hush puppies were the trend of the 1990's.

Caldwell explores why and how shifts like this happen by examining the moves, conditions, and communications of change. Caldwell points out there are three basic characteristics when change happens. One, the event is contagious; two, there is cause

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\(^2\) Ibid., 4.
and effect; three, change happens dramatically. The first two are contingent upon the last. The third is most important as it explains how change happens, and that dramatic moment when everything can change at once is the tipping point.

By putting Mary in context it is easy to see that the use of her image was done at a tipping point. Medieval Europe was already at a point of economic transformation and diseases such as the plague and stress within the church-state alliance appears to have set the stage for period of adjustment. During this time, there was also an increase in overall public education and interest in finding and understanding faith. Church leaders were trying to respond to the changing times and answer important questions while also increasing its membership. Officials attempted to resolve internal strife by using Mary, but they could not have known that using her image as part of a medieval church offensive would have become so popular and trendy that her image would be a contributing factor to the split of the Christian faith.

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3 Ibid., 9.
CONCLUSION

Anyone who attended Sunday school on a regular basis as a child was quickly exposed to the image of Mary. Her portrayal has been and will always be one of a caring mother and protector, a woman of humility, obedience, holiness, and perfection. Her story is fundamental to the story of Christ and identifying with her traits is something every Christian follower is taught. It is this image that reached a tipping point in the Middle Ages making Mary the medieval trend. The level of importance devoted to her during this time is primarily due to the lack of biblical information about her story that left many with a desire to better understand her role in the Christian faith. However, church officials underestimated the basic level of attraction to her image which contributed to her rise in popularity and devotion across all genders and class.

The fundamentals of Christianity are simple yet complex. To be a Christian one believes that Mary gave birth to Jesus and Jesus is the Son of God, who was both divine and human. In order for this to be true several events must also be true. First, Eve committed the first act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden by eating fruit from a tree that God explicating told them not to pick from. The early writings of the church state it was this act which damned humanity to a life punishment of death and sin, and cursed all women. The Isaiah narrative states that a virgin will conceive the Son of God, and the Gospels of Matthew and Luke inform the reader that Mary is the Blessed Virgin that will be the mother of this child, and this child will redeem the first act of sin. Christian followers believe this is all proven by the fact that during the human life of Jesus he performed miracles, and after his death he was resurrected and ascended into heaven.
The scripture also teaches that Jesus was fully human, with a physical body while at the same time he was the Son of God. Several questions and issues arise about how a virgin birth occurred given humankind is comprised of all sinners, and exactly how Mary fit in this equation was (and is) debated among Christian sects. It is exceptionally important to note that the fundamental belief among all Christians is that Mary is the mother of Jesus, and Jesus is the Son of God. The story of the virgin birth solved both of these requirements: Christ was born of a woman so as to be fully man; yet was born as result of the miraculous intervention of God, by means of the Holy Spirit -- the result of which was that Adam and Eve’s sin was not passed to Jesus. Mary gave birth to a son untainted by sin, and that son was the Messiah. This is the Christian doctrine, and if one does not believe these basic foundational accounts then he or she is likely not a Christian.

The fact is Mary’s image had to rise. In order for the biblical narrative to be connected, her background and path to a virgin birth had to be highlighted, emphasized, and expanded. There was considerable debate during the Middle Ages about her role and understanding her participation in the Christian story had to be solidified and not left for debate. It would have been important to have a unified message and strong foundational support to grow and build upon. Church leaders had to resolve the dispute, connect the biblical narrative, and ensure the message was well defined and focused in order to promote the faith. After this, church officials relied on an old traditional method used under the reign of Constantine to disseminate her image and story through patronage. This method worked during third century Rome and helped turn skeptics into followers thereby making the religion popular and accessible. It would make sense leaders would revert to the approach again.
The practice of utilizing art as a teaching mechanism for greater spiritual enlightenment has always encountered great opposition; however, it works. Mary was not the first image to rise and cause controversy. By examining Christianity's origins it becomes clear that many early church leaders appreciated and comprehended how to make use of images. However, as a consequence of her rise, men and women alike became infatuated with her thereby quickly making her the medieval trend. Men loved her, women wanted to be her, and everyone wanted to build a church for her. Unfortunately, this devotion was a contributing factor in the split of the Christian faith and once again the world was forever changed by the use of an image.

Understanding the power of Mary's image during the Middle Ages is the key to unlocking her power. It is known and documented the Middle Ages were marked by the diversification and growth of the economy as well as a more well educated society. As the citizenry became better informed questions arose related to the biblical narrative and doctrine. This made it more important than ever to firmly establish the story of Christ and reaffirm his divinity as defined by Constantine. Church and political leaders knew Mary to be a vital component to this yet little was known about her from the scripture. It became essential for Christianity to once again go on a major church offensive just as Constantine did in third century Rome in order to promote the Christian faith. Constantine’s equation of patronage plus prominence equals growth was once again used for Mary. What the church may not have expected is how many people would be drawn to her in pursuit of faith and understanding. Even if the role of Mary divides the Christian community, to call oneself a Christian one must believe in her existence and that she is the Mother of God. Her link to the birth and ascension of Jesus into heaven is
fundamental to the Christian faith and without believing that she was indeed born without
sin then the prophecy is hard to explain. As followers began to ask more questions in
order to fully understand their own faith and understanding, more clarity was given by
the church. In some instances this caused discord for those desperately seeking Mary, but
for others it may have provided a valuable tool for understanding one’s own faith.
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